

THE HERO
A STUDY IN TRADITION, MYTH,
AND DRAMA

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THE HERO

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AND DRAMA

BY

LORD RAGLAN

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TO
JANETTA AND FITZROY
WHO ENJOY FAIRY TALES
WITHOUT BELIEVING THEM TO BE TRUE

PREFACE

It is often said that "there is no smoke without fire." What those who use this expression mean by it is that their wish to believe any story or part of a story makes it historically true. They never apply it to a story which they know to be historically untrue, however much "smoke" it may have emitted.

Those who are convinced that Bunyan was an earnest and truthful man, who meant every word that he wrote, do not conclude that Christian and Faithfull were historical characters. Those who are delighted with the realism of Dickens's descriptions do not conclude that the *Pickwick Papers* are the embellished adventures of a real Mr. Pickwick. Those who remember how many clever people were convinced by the story told by the Tichborne claimant do not conclude that that story was founded on fact.

It should be clear that the veracity and earnestness of a narrator and the vividness and verisimilitude of a narrative are no criteria of historicity; that many clever men have believed stories which are now known to be quite untrue; and that the truth of a story is to be judged by evidence alone. As regards modern stories, all this would no doubt be generally agreed, but towards ancient stories a totally different attitude is commonly adopted. It is at least possible that Homer, though he meant all that he said, may have intended it to be understood in a religious and not in a historical sense. It is at least possible that the saga writers, like Dickens, may have collected sayings and incidents

from a variety of sources and attached them to persons who never existed. It is at least possible that the story of Hengist and Horsa, like the story of the Tichborne claimant, may have been invented to support a false claim. But whereas modern stories, such as those I have mentioned, are assumed to be fictitious unless there is good reason to believe them historical, old stories are commonly assumed to be historical unless they can be proved to be fictitious. Interest in historical fact, which is notoriously rare among moderns, is gratuitously assumed to have been universal among the ancients. In the following pages I shall try to show that the "smoke" which arises from these oft-told tales is the outcome of mythical and not of historical fires.

The main thesis of the book was put forward in the Presidential Address which I gave to Section H of the British Association in 1933. Part of Chapter II appeared under the title of "Fiction in Pedigree" in the *National Review* for December 1933. The greater part of Chapters XV and XVI were given as a paper to the Folklore Society, and printed in *Folk-Lore* for October 1934. A series of articles, embodying much of the material relating to Robin Hood, Sigurd, King Arthur, Cuchulainn, Helen, and Falstaff, appeared under the title of "Quasi-Historical Personages" in the *Illustrated London News* in the spring of this year.

Many friends, too many to mention individually, have helped me with suggestions, criticisms, references, and the loan of books; I cannot, however, omit a reference to Mr. R. Bowen, B.A., Librarian to the Monmouthshire County Council, whose wide knowledge of English literature has been of great service to me.

That the book has many defects I am only too well aware. They are due in part to the fact that it has been written in the depths of the country; in part to my limited knowledge of foreign languages; and in part to the variety of treatment which the subjects dealt with (including the names) have met with at the hands of those who have written upon them. Further research is needed on many points, but I am satisfied that the thesis, in its broad outlines, is established beyond all reasonable doubt.

RAGLAN.

June, 1936.

PREFACE TO THINKER'S LIBRARY EDITION

WHEN this book first appeared letters were written to the Press and to myself, giving examples of "genuine folk-memory" of remote events. Such of these as I was able to put to the test failed to pass it.

To those who pointed out slips and inaccuracies, and in particular to Dr. C. K. Meek, I am much obliged. I have made a few small additions.

My conclusions have not found favour with classical scholars, but have, in general, commended themselves to the scientifically-minded, and I have seen no reason to modify them.

RAGLAN.

June, 1948.

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PART I

TRADITION

CHAPTER I

THE BASIS OF HISTORY

ONLY the smallest fraction of the human race has ever acquired the habit of taking an objective view of the past. For most people, even most educated people, the past is merely a prologue to the present, not merely without interest in so far as it is independent of the present, but simply inconceivable except in terms of the present. The events of our own past life are remembered, not as they seemed to us at the time, but merely as incidents leading up to our present situation. We cannot persuade ourselves, in fact we make no attempt to do so, that undertakings which ended in failure or fiasco were entered upon with just as much forethought and optimism as those which have profoundly affected our lives. We suppose our beliefs and mental processes to have been ever the same as they now are, and regard the story of our lives not as a cross-country walk upon which we are still engaged, but as a path, cut deliberately by fate and ourselves, to the positions which we now occupy.

In our consideration of the story of others, our minds work in the same way. We judge every event by its consequences, and assume that those consequences must have seemed just as inevitable to those who took part in it as they do to ourselves. We find it difficult to believe that when the ship went down those who were to be drowned felt just the same as those who were to be saved. We say that coming events cast their shadows before them, but what we really mean is that later events cast their shadows back over earlier ones.

This lack of mental perspective, from which we all suffer, displays itself in the saying—"Call no man happy "until he is dead," which implies that a few hours or days of pain or misfortune can outweigh long years of happiness and success. All this is characteristic of our study of history. We regard the events of the reigns of Louis XV and Louis XVI as leading up inevitably to the French Revolution, though Voltaire and Gibbon saw no sign of an impending catastrophe. We regard Stonewall Jackson as having fought in a losing cause, though at the time of his death the Confederates were getting the best of it. In a word, even those of us who take a genuine interest in the facts of history tend, either by our mental limitations or the defects of our education, to see them in a false perspective.

Before discussing history any further, I ought to follow what should be a universal practice by defining the term. History, then, is the recital in chronological sequence of events which are known to have occurred. Without precise chronology there can be no history, since the essence of history is the relation of events in their correct sequence. We might know something of the Battle of Marengo and something of the Battle of Waterloo, but we could not attempt to compose a history of Napoleon unless we knew which came first.

Why do people study and transmit historical facts? It cannot be with the sole object of studying and transmitting historical facts. Educated people study history for a variety of reasons—because they hope to find in it an explanation of the present and an indication of the future; because their curiosity is aroused by survivals from the past; because the classics were long regarded as the source of all knowledge, and a knowledge of the classics involves some knowledge of history; because the Bible and other religious works contain historical references; because they get a living by it; because for these and possibly for other reasons some knowledge of history has come to be regarded as part of the mental equipment of an educated person. Our interest in history is, however, inseparable from books. It is

very remarkable that our dependence upon books is so little realized, even by teachers and writers, who live by books. An illiterate person, if he were interested in history, could learn it only from the lips of an historian, or from a person who could read a history book to him, and if he forgot a fact he could regain it only by having recourse to his teacher. The amount of historical knowledge that he could acquire would be limited by the fact that he would have no means of tabulating or classifying it, and could therefore have no idea of chronology outside the very limited range of his own experience. All history depends, as I have said, upon chronology, and no real idea of chronology can be obtained except by seeing facts tabulated in chronological sequence.

This was brought home to me when I was showing my five-year-old son round the amphitheatre at Caerleon, and telling him something of the Romans in Britain. He looked rather puzzled, and asked, "Were 'you there then, Daddy?'" When we read of the Irish blacksmith, who said that his smithy was much older than the local dolmen; it was there in his grandfather's time, and he died a very old man—or of the English rustic who said that the parish church (thirteenth century) was very old indeed; it was there before he came to the parish, and that was over forty years ago—we are apt to suppose the speakers exceptionally stupid or ignorant, but their attitude towards the past is similar to that of the Australian black, who began a story with, "Long, long ago, when my mother was a 'baby, the sun shone all day and all night,'"¹ and is the inevitable result of illiteracy.

It would be almost impossible to make an illiterate person realize that the date A.D. 1600 had any meaning at all. Calendar sticks are used by tribes of both Africa and America to keep a record of events within living memory, but there is no means by which such a record could be preserved longer. Bundles of sticks convey nothing except to those who tie them together, and if

¹ *Folk-Lore*, xlvi, p. 233.

you were to tell your illiterate that a stick represented a year, and then count out 335 sticks, he would be little the wiser. And if you were to tell him that Queen Elizabeth and Shakespeare both lived then, he would find it difficult to believe you, since if Shakespeare were really connected with some ancient monarch, which since a play of his was performed quite recently seems highly improbable, it should be King Lear, whom he tells us all about, rather than Queen Elizabeth, whom he hardly mentions.

The fact that chronology depends upon reading and writing seems quite unknown to historians. Thus, according to Professor Chambers,¹ "it is probable "that, even in heathen times, despite the absence of "written records, the succession of monarchs and the "length of their reigns may have been committed to "memory with considerable exactness." Yet he suggests no motive for committing such facts to memory, nor any possible machinery for transmitting them, and he asks us to believe that the Anglo-Saxons of the Settlement had conceptions of chronology which were quite foreign to their descendants even a thousand years later. The editor of the *Paston Letters* tells us² that "the mode in which the letters are dated by their "writers shows clearly that our ancestors were ac- "customed to measure the lapse of time by very "different standards from those now in use. Whether "men in general were acquainted with the current year "of the Christian era may be doubted; that was an "ecclesiastical computation rather than one for use in "common life. They seldom dated their letters by the "year at all, and when they did it was not by the year "of our Lord, but by the year of the king's reign. "Chronicles and annals of the period which give the "year of our Lord are almost always full of inaccur- "acies in the figures; and altogether it is evident that "an exact computation of years was a thing for which "there was considered to be little practical use." That

¹ R. W. Chambers, *England Before the Norman Conquest*, p. 69.

² *Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner, vol. i, p. ccclxv.

the exactness of chronology which Professor Chambers postulates for the illiterate Saxons of the fifth century was quite foreign to the literate English of the fifteenth indicates that his postulate is nothing more than an ill-considered guess.

That English illiterates have in fact no sense of chronology at all has been noted by several writers. "The folk have no sense of history," says Mr. Fox Strangways;¹ "there would be nothing improbable to them in St. George meeting Napoleon in the same ballad." Sir E. K. Chambers tells us that in the Mylor (Cornwall) folk-play the battles of Agincourt and Quebec, and the capture of Porto Bello by Vernon in 1739, have all been mixed up together.²

"There is another characteristic of the folk-play," says Mr. Tiddy,³ "which has an interesting connection with popular taste. The absence of any historic sense . . . cannot be passed over. For us it is quite impossible to realize the state of mind to which a century, let alone five hundred years, means nothing at all; and yet that is the normal condition even of the majority of those who have been subjected to the modern elementary education. Thanks to this state of mind our village ancestors a century ago could pit St. George against Bonaparte without the least sense of incongruity; and even without the evidence of Chaucer we should have good reason to believe that our ancestors of the Middle Ages were liable to the same kind of absurdity. To the folk, it might almost be said, 'a thousand years are but as yesterday.' "

These plays are acted and ballads recited by members of what is at any rate a semi-literate community. The ideas of St. George and of Agincourt, if not derived originally from books, have certainly been reinforced by book-learning. In a semi-literate community all the members, including the illiterate, not merely benefit from the existence of books, but learn

¹ A. H. F. Strangways, *Cecil Sharp*, p. 51.

² E. K. Chambers, *The English Folk-play*, p. 83.

³ R. J. E. Tiddy, *The Mummers' Play*, p. 93.

to understand something of the meaning and purpose of books and written records generally. In totally illiterate communities, however, such as still exist in Central Africa or Northern Australia, the whole structure of society is based upon a system from which reading and writing are completely absent, so that the purpose of writing is not merely unknown, but is totally inconceivable. And since the purpose of writing is inconceivable, the idea of any form of knowledge which might be preserved by writing is also inconceivable. Forms of knowledge which depend, even in part, upon written record, can have for the savage no existence at all. Since history depends upon written chronology, and the savage has no written chronology, the savage can have no history. And since interest in the past is induced solely by books, the savage can take no interest in the past; the events of the past are, in fact, completely lost. We shall realize this fact better if we consider how soon the past is lost among ourselves whenever it is not recalled to us by books. How many women of to-day know, for example, what is meant by a sprunking, a palatine, or a farthingale? Yet it is not a great many years since these words were as familiar as the word *jumper* is now.

Even the most familiar facts are soon forgotten. In the neolithic age polished stone axes were made by the thousand, but soon after they were superseded by the introduction of metal all knowledge of them was lost, and a few centuries later it had come to be believed that anyone who happened to find one had come upon a thunderbolt.¹

When, therefore, we attribute to the savage an interest in the past comparable to our interest in the history of England, we are attributing to him a taste which he could not possibly possess, and which if he did possess he could not possibly gratify. The savage, again, has far less than we have to remind him of the past. There may be ancient ruins, but since he has no means, even if he had the wish, to learn their history,

¹ A. B. Cook, *Zeus*, vol. ii, p. 510.

he contents himself with attributing to them a supernatural origin, by which he means little more than that they must have been made by people whose customs were unnatural, since they were different from his own. He thinks about them to this extent, if they thrust themselves upon his notice, but if they have no use they have no real interest. The attitude of most Europeans to relics of the past is very much the same.

In illiterate communities all transmitted knowledge is traditional, and tradition is strictly utilitarian. There are so many things which must be remembered—all the means of procuring, storing, and preparing food; the ways of building houses and canoes, and of making weapons, tools, clothes, and ornaments; all the magical rites, songs, dances, sacrifices, and purifications, as well as the relationships, upon which depend marriage, inheritance, and social obligations. All this would mean a good deal to a literate person, who could make a note of the facts, file it for reference, and then banish the matter from his mind, but in an illiterate community nothing which is of any value can be banished from the mind, since once lost it can never be recalled. It is not that the savage is mentally incapable of transmitting the events of the remote past, but that there is no inducement to transmit them, no machinery by which they can be transmitted, and a great deal of other matter which has to be transmitted and remembered. He may remember that there was a great drought in his grandfather's time, because his village still has a claim to lands which were then vacated; he may remember that there was a war with the next village in his father's time, because it led to a blood-feud which has not yet been settled. But when all the participants have died, and all the feuds have been settled, then the war is forgotten. There is no inducement to remember it, and no machinery by means of which its memory could be preserved.

"When a man grows old and feeble," says Colonel MacNabb,¹ writing of the Chins of Burma, "and is un-

¹ D. MacNabb, *Report on the Chins*, p. 16.

"able to exact his dues by force . . . and when at the "feast his voice is no longer the loudest and his hand "no longer the strongest, then his son gradually begins "to take his place. Instead of the son deferring to the "father, the father defers to the son, and finally he is "turned out of his house and made to end his days in "a small hut. Before death claims him he is forgotten "and set aside . . . and a man who in his prime may "have been a power in the land, the hero of a hundred "raids, and the owner of much property, is, in his old "age, a nonentity." The Chins, it seems, completely lose interest, not merely in the remoter past, but in the events of thirty years ago, and in my belief this is the case with illiterates in general, except in so far as their own personal exploits are concerned.

Speaking of the Jukun of Nigeria, Dr. Meek¹ comments on "the singular absence of any interest or pride "in the past, or of any knowledge of events prior to "the beginning of the last century. . . . There is no "clear tradition among the Jukun relating to the "destruction of their principal city," and even its site is uncertain, though the Fulani conquest is believed to have happened only about a hundred and twenty years ago.² Things are much the same in Europe. We are told that within fifty years of Napoleon's death the French peasantry had completely forgotten the facts of his career, and that ten years earlier it was difficult to find anything surviving of the songs about him which had once such a widespread popularity.³

Most illiterate communities have, of course, traditional stories, and these stories may seem to be memories of historical events. They tell of the journeys and victories of heroes, and with some rationalization and rearrangement these journeys and victories can be made to represent historical migrations and conquests. These stories, however, are really myths. What a myth is we shall consider later; here I may note that,

¹ C. K. Meek, *A Sudanese Kingdom*, p. 21.

² *Ibid.*, p. 43.

³ A. van Gennep, *La Formation des Légendes*, p. 193.

according to van Gennep (the writer whom I have just cited),¹ the leading heroes of French tradition are not Charlemagne and his successors on the throne, but Roland, Gargantua, and the Little Red Man.

If illiterate people really took an interest in the events of the past, we should expect to find that when people began to write they would soon begin to make records of past events. So far, however, is this from being the case that it is doubtful whether the ancient inhabitants of Egypt and Mesopotamia had any history at all in our sense of the term. Such records of fact as were kept seem to have been merely the by-product of a system of drawing up elaborate calendars for the purposes of ritual. "Religious and magical "factors," says Dr. S. A. Cook,² "have also been "prominent in the rise of history-writing, and Mesopotamian astrological tablets record, for the warning "of all concerned, portents, signs, catastrophes." Kings may have recorded their victories as a charm to secure further success; at any rate they seem never to have recorded the victories of their predecessors.

In the Egypt of Herodotus' time there seems to have been no corpus of recognized history at all. The discrepant tales which the priests told him were almost entirely mythical, and the only fact upon which they were agreed was that the Egyptians had invented the calendar.³ Most of *Herodotus* is myth, but I believe that he has a good claim to the title of father of history, since I can find no evidence that before his time the idea of history had ever occurred to anyone. The history of Herodotus was defective because his materials were inadequate.

Let us now consider what the materials of history are.

In the first class we will place accounts written at the time by persons who were present at the events which they describe—letters, despatches, reports, diaries, memoranda.

¹ A. van Gennep, *La Formation des Légendes*, pp. 185–6.

² *Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. i, p. 218.

³ *Herodotus*, ii, 4.

In the second class are accounts by eye-witnesses, but not written down until some time after the event—autobiographies, reminiscences, pleadings, inscriptions.

In the third class I would place the archaeological evidence. This, though it can seldom give us actual dates, yet often produces clear chronological sequences, and indicates unmistakably the presence or absence of certain groups at certain places.

In the fourth class are accounts written by people who obtained their information from actors or spectators shortly after the event—annals, chronicles, minutes of evidence, press reports, news-letters, and other forms of contemporary correspondence. These would not be accepted as evidence in a court of law, but are often very properly accepted by the court of history.

In a fifth class we may place accounts obtained by questioning people as to what happened a long time before, or accounts obtained at second or third hand. These are often recorded as survivors' tales, conversations, memories, gleanings.

It should be quite clear that the first four classes are, in varying degree, the only genuine sources of history. The fifth class may be useful for reconciling discrepancies or filling in details, but would not be accepted as a primary authority for a fact otherwise unknown. Second-hand evidence is not accepted in a court of law because it is notoriously unreliable; it may be accepted by historians, but only if it is given by persons especially well placed or well qualified to obtain the facts. Nobody would accept a fact on fourth-hand evidence alone, yet that is what tradition, supposing it to be historical, is at best.

"But," it may be said, "tradition is quite different. You are speaking of events which are known only to a few people, but tradition is what is known to the whole community." Tradition, certainly, is known to the whole community, but what historical facts are known to the whole community? How many people know at first-, or even at third-, hand what blows the

hero struck in the battle, what the queen said to the king, or what passed between the conspirators? Very few indeed, and the fact that a rumour went through the crowd has no evidential value whatever; a garbled account becomes more garbled every time it is repeated. The loss of a battle or the destruction of a city may be known to many, and if tradition were wholly or even chiefly made up of such incidents, it might be possible to make out a case for regarding it as founded upon fact. Such incidents, however, play but a small part in tradition, which consists chiefly of incidents in the lives of kings, queens, and heroes. Now the stories of court life that get abroad to-day are always inaccurate and often quite untrue, and we have no reason to believe that things were different a thousand or five thousand years ago. It is tedious to continue with generalities, so let us take a concrete case, that of King Alfred and the cakes. Supposing it to have been a true story, how could it have become public property? Even if the old woman had dared to whisper it to her cronies, they would not have believed her, and the king would never have recounted a story which would have exposed him to ridicule and lowered the prestige upon which his success depended. The story is really a myth, which seems to have been first attached to King Alfred in the twelfth century.¹

Sir E. K. Chambers tells us that in such tales the names are the least permanent feature. He instances the story of how a horseman leaped over Bodrugan Head, in Cornwall, to escape from his pursuers. This story was once told of Tristram, later of Sir Bors, and has recently been transferred to one Henry of Bodrugan, who took the wrong side at Bosworth. "The 'lapse of folk-memory,'" he says, "is as characteristic as its tenacity. When I passed Athelney last year, a 'Glastonbury car-driver called my attention to a 'farmhouse in which 'Arthur' burnt the cakes.'"²

I shall discuss "folk-memory" presently; let us first

¹ R. W. Chambers, op. cit., p. 202.

² E. K. Chambers, *Arthur of Britain*, pp. 193-4.

consider the question of how long an incident which is not recorded in writing can be remembered. After much consideration I have fixed on the term of one hundred and fifty years as the maximum. I have arrived at this figure, which is of course approximate, in various ways.¹ A careful study of what is known of my grandparents and great-grandparents has convinced me that any fact about a person which is not placed on record within a hundred years of his death is lost. Giving a person about fifty years of active life, we get a hundred and fifty years as the limit. Among ourselves the names of the dead are recorded in various ways, but I believe that, among the illiterate, anyone who has been dead a hundred years is completely forgotten. Again I have known cases in which old men have succeeded in impressing incidents of their own lives upon children in such a way that the children remember them; but they cannot impress in this way incidents which have not made an impression upon themselves. Matter that is not part of the group tradition thus dies out in the second generation. A study of the facts which survive, and of the processes by which facts are transmitted, gives a maximum period of about one hundred and fifty years in both cases.

This is easy enough to check in Europe, but among savages is very difficult because it is seldom that we have any idea of what did take place a hundred and fifty years ago. We often find, however, chiefs who are alleged to be about fifth in descent from culture-heroes, and many mythical events which are alleged to have occurred about a hundred and fifty years before they are narrated or first recorded. A hundred and fifty years ago, or even less, we are in a period the events of which have been completely forgotten, and which is therefore available for the myths. These, being ageless, can be allotted to any period.

Every incident begins to fade from the minds of both actors and spectators as soon as it has occurred. As

¹ A. van Gennep, op. cit. p. 164, fixes upon two hundred years, but makes a number of exceptions.

long as some of them are alive, a record of the incident may be preserved in their subconscious minds, even if they do not consciously remember it. Of this we cannot be certain, but what is quite certain is that facts cannot be transmitted from one person to another by means of the subconscious mind. The only facts which I can transmit to my children, writing apart, are those of which I am conscious ; these require an effort on my part to transmit, and a greater effort on my children's part to remember. Conceit may lead me to transmit to my children, probably in a not quite accurate form, certain selected incidents from my own career, but what inducement have my children to remember them and pass them on ? And if people do not, as in fact they usually do not, take the trouble to preserve facts about their own immediate relatives, why should they take so much trouble about more remote persons ? The only writer on tradition who has attempted to answer this question is, so far as I can learn, Professor Chadwick, who says :¹ "The existence of a poem or "story which deals with reminiscences of tribal con- "flicts necessarily presupposes an absorbing interest "in tribal history." He goes on to suggest that this interest could be due only to patriotism, but fails to realize that ardent patriots are notoriously indifferent to historical facts ; any fable which gratifies their national pride is history to them. Professor Chadwick, then, does not take us very far in our search for an answer, and none of the other writers whom I have consulted attempt to deal with the question at all. They seem to assume that the details of battles and floods, court intrigues, and even domestic conversations, transmit themselves down the ages quite independently of human effort, or even of human volition. They achieve this, it would seem, by the aid of a mysterious agency which Sir E. K. Chambers, as we have seen, calls "folk-memory." The same term is used by Professor J. L. Myres,² while Professor T. H.

¹ H. M. Chadwick, *The Heroic Age*, p. 273.

² *J.R.A.I.*, 1933, p. 295.

Robinson calls it "race-memory."¹ He tells us that the story of the flood, as it stands in Genesis, is a "race-memory of a remote historical event." Similarly Professor Gordon Childe² assures us that "the ancient Sumerian creation legend, wherein order is conjured "out of the primeval chaos by the separation of land "from water, preserves a vivid recollection of the tasks "imposed upon the first colonists." Professor Childe can hardly suppose that the writers of the legend had seen in real life anything like what the legend describes, and if they had not seen it, how could they preserve a vivid recollection of it? Such terms seem to me to be quite meaningless; a memory is an individual possession just as much as a hand; I can pass on what is held in my memory as well as what is held in my hand, but my memory itself dies with me. Such terms as "race-memory" and "folk-memory" suggest that there exists in every illiterate community something analogous to our Public Record Office, and obscures the fact that every unwritten tradition must be transmitted by conscious individual effort at least once in each generation.

Professor Hocart, it seems to me, falls into a similar error when he says:³ "Diversity of origin is, in my "experience, one of the most tenacious memories a "people can have. If foreigners come and settle, "whether peacefully or by conquest, among another "people, they will remember that, if nothing else. "Even decayed rustics living a precarious existence on "the edge of the jungle remember that, long ago, the "people in the next hamlet came from overseas under "seven princes; yet all difference of language and "custom has vanished." It is easy to show that such migrations, when they are real and not mythical, are soon forgotten. In the ninth and tenth centuries many thousands of Danes settled in Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, and other counties of north-east England, and

¹ *Myth and Ritual*, ed. S. H. Hooke, p. 189.

² V. G. Childe, *The Most Ancient East*, p. 124.

³ *Man*, 1929, p. 102.

the inhabitants of those counties must be largely of Danish descent, yet, far from recognizing this descent, they regard the Danes as enemies who came to plunder and then sailed away. In the eleventh century a great part of Lancashire and Cumberland was settled by Norwegians, and Norwegian was for long the language of that area, yet the fact is known only to students of history. In the sixteenth there was a large influx of Protestant Flemings into south-eastern England ; they anglicized their names, and within a couple of generations were absorbed into the population.

The rapidity with which historical events are forgotten shows how unlikely it is that what is remembered in the form of tradition should be history. I shall now proceed to examine various types of tradition, real or so-called, and shall show that, wherever they can be tested, their lack of historicity becomes apparent.

CHAPTER II

THE TRADITIONAL PEDIGREE

THERE are two forms of narrative which pass as traditional—that which has really been handed down by word of mouth from time immemorial, and that which, though it may sometimes pass from mouth to mouth, is derived from a literary source. The former I shall refer to as traditional, and the latter as pseudo-traditional. Since many people's belief in the historicity of tradition is based upon, or at any rate strongly supported by, their belief in the traditional pedigree, it may be as well to begin by showing that there is in England no such thing as a genuinely traditional pedigree at all.

It may be objected that the pedigree is not a narrative. As we are accustomed to see it, it is, of course, merely a collection of names and dates, connected by lines and mathematical signs. It is in fact, however, a series of potted biographies, and the lines and signs are too often employed to give a spurious appearance of mathematical certainty to statements which are unsupported by evidence or even demonstrably untrue.

There are, of course, many genuinely old pedigrees; these are always based on contemporary records, and get progressively fewer as we go farther back. There are one or two probably genuine pedigrees which go back to the eleventh century, but none which go back to the period of the Norman Conquest. The names of very few of the Normans who fought at Hastings and still fewer of the Saxons have been preserved, and of these hardly any of the former and none of the latter are known to have left descendants. There is no Englishman who can trace his family to the time of the Conquest by any evidence which would be admitted in a court of law.

Those, however, who claim Norman or Saxon

ancestry do not trouble about contemporary records ; they rely upon what they call tradition, and maintain that these alleged traditions cannot be disproved, and are therefore entitled to credence. That we are bound to believe what we cannot disprove is a misguided view which, however, we need not discuss here, since our so-called traditional pedigrees can always be disproved, for the most part quite easily. The reason for this is that they are not really traditional at all, but are due either to the efforts of pedigree fakers or to the guesses of amateur historians. The former have flourished at all times, but their golden age was the reign of Queen Elizabeth, when, in order to satisfy the new men, all of whom desired a Norman ancestry, "the pedigree-maker stuck at nothing ; he forged "documents, not only in Old Latin, but in Old English "and Old French, and these he showed to the heralds, "by whom they were easily swallowed."¹ These forgeries led to many innocent blunders by amateurs, and were generally accepted until towards the end of the last century, when a group of students made an exhaustive study of all available documents bearing on the Norman period. As a result they were able to throw much light upon some of the darker aspects of our history, and incidentally to show that the Norman England of Sir Walter Scott and his imitators bears no recognizable resemblance to the genuine article, and that our "traditional" pedigrees all contain blunders which mark them out as fictions of a later age.

Many of the alleged ancestors occupied positions which would involve their mention in Domesday, which omits to mention them, or held manors which are known to have been held by others, or not to have existed at all. Such blunders, however, are only to be detected by the expert, whereas anyone who is prepared to spend a little time in the study of Norman and Saxon nomenclature can condemn most "traditional" pedigrees at a glance.

Let us start with the Saxons, and note without sur-

¹ J. H. Round, *Family Origins*, p. 5.

prise that they were called by Saxon names. Examples of such names can be found in any history—Godwin, Stigand, Siward, Leofric. The Saxons were not called William, Walter, or Robert, because these were Norman-French names which were introduced into England by the Normans. A pre-Conquest Saxon would be no more likely to be called by a Norman-French name than would a modern Englishman to be called Marcel or Gaston, yet the Saxon “ancestors” of the pedigrees are almost always called by such names.

So much for the Christian names of the Saxons; now to surnames. The Saxons had no surnames. A Godric might be referred to as “the timberer,” or “the son of ‘Guthlac,’ ” but these were not his names; whether he was earl or churl he had one name, and one name only. This single name was never a place-name. Like the Scandinavians, Irish, and Welsh, the Saxons never used place-names as personal names. It is clear then that when a Saxon ancestor is alleged to have been called Bertram Ashburnham or William Pewse, he must be a fake, since no Saxon was ever called Bertram or Ashburnham or William or Pewse. Stanley of Stanley, who is alleged to have flourished fifty years before the Conquest, “Wynkfelde the Saxon,” the alleged ancestor of the Wingfields, and many another, proclaim themselves by their very names to be creatures of fiction. The fact that not a single Saxon ancestor can be supported by evidence merely confirms what was in most cases a foregone conclusion.

The case of the Normans is different, since there are in existence several families with genuine Norman pedigrees, though these do not go nearly so far back as is popularly supposed. Here again it is necessary to study the names. During their residence in France the Normans had almost completely dropped their Norse names, and had adopted such Frankish names as Richard, Hugh, and Baldwin, besides those mentioned above. William’s army contained many Frenchmen and Flemings, as well as Normans, but their names were much the same. There was also a large contingent

of Bretons, who had some names of their own. Of these Alan was the commonest, though the ancestor of the FitzAlans (once famous but long extinct) did not come over till the next century. In that century a few biblical names began to creep in, probably under the influence of the Crusades; previously such names as John and Thomas are not found among either Normans or Saxons. The range of Norman names was not wide; no Norman was ever called Hildebrand, the alleged Norman ancestor of the Alingtons, and such names as Titus and Theophilus, which appear at the head of some "Norman" pedigrees, are equally absurd. Nor did the Normans have double Christian names, which are rare before the eighteenth century, and unknown before the sixteenth.

Unlike the Saxons, the Normans had surnames, but before about 1150 these were personal and not hereditary. William, son of Hugh and lord of Dinard, would be called William FitzHugh or William de Dinard, or both. His son would be called Richard FitzWilliam, and would be called de Dinard only if he actually owned it. If we find Robert de Dinard succeeding Richard de Dinard, it by no means follows that they were relatives; Richard might have sold, or died without heirs, or been dispossessed.

We know that Robert de Belesme was the son of Roger de Montgomery; that Richard de Réviers was the son of Baldwin de Meules, and that Roger de Bréteuil was the son of William FitzOsbern, but these were great nobles, and for lesser men such evidence is, before 1150, extremely rare. By 1200 most of the nobles had settled down to hereditary surnames, but as late as 1245 we find Robert FitzRoger succeeding his father, Roger FitzJohn, as lord of Clavering. Among the commoners the custom of passing on surnames from father to son spread more slowly still, and is hardly yet established in the wilder parts of Wales.

About 1400 place-names began to be borne as surnames without "de" or "of" before them, and it was then, and not till then, that it became possible for

men to be called Bertram Ashburnham or William Pewse.

It is to be noted that the Norman nobles whom I mentioned above have to-day no descendants, and the same applies to their successors. Of the families in which earldoms were created from 1066 until 1442, when John, Lord Talbot, became Earl of Shrewsbury, in two only, Courtenay and Nevill, is there a legitimate descendant in the male line. Bigod, Bohun, Clare, Valence, Vere, Warenne, and many others whose deeds once made English history, all are gone. A few lesser families are known to have survived from the twelfth century, but so many more are known to have died out that the probabilities are always strongly against survival. It is, in fact, hardly an exaggeration to say that the Normans have left no legitimate descendants at all.

As we have already noted, the early Normans, de Belesme and the rest, came from France, and their surnames were therefore, like their Christian names, French. They thereby differ from the "Norman "ancestor," who usually lands at Pevensey already equipped with the English surname, de Alington, de Burton, or whatever it may be, which his descendants will subsequently assume. He also styles himself "sir," unaware that knights were not so styled till the thirteenth century, and often makes the further mistake of bearing his family arms, unaware that family arms had not yet been invented. The origin of heraldry is involved in obscurity, but there seems no doubt that the first coat of arms of those that are still borne was that of the three golden leopards on a red field which was adopted by King Richard I in 1198. This coat is that of our sovereign, and anyone who seeks to take precedence of him should be regarded with the gravest suspicion.

In the matter of building, also, the "Norman "ancestor" was apt to be before his time. Usually the first thing he did after settling in England was to build a stone castle. The early Norman castles were, how-

ever, wooden structures on a mound of earth, and stone castles were not, with one or two well-known exceptions, built until well on in the twelfth century.

Even in the matter of dress the "Norman ancestor" may go wrong. The "traditional" ancestor of the Fitzwilliams, Sir William FitzWilliam, received for his bravery at the Battle of Hastings a scarf from the Conqueror's own arm, which is still an heirloom. But the real founder of the family was a London tradesman of the thirteenth century, and such scarves were not worn until the sixteenth.¹

An interesting example of the "traditional" pedigree is that of the Wakes. The family of Wake is one of the oldest in England, and its present head is Sir Hereward Wake, thirteenth baronet. The family "tradition" is that it is descended in the direct male line from the famous Saxon hero, Hereward the Wake. The facts appear to be as follows: in 1166 a Norman named Hugh Wac came over from Normandy, and married the heiress of the Norman FitzGilbert, lord of Bourne in Lincolnshire. About two hundred years later the family of Wake, as it had then become, having attained to wealth and importance, thought itself entitled to a more high-sounding pedigree, and having discovered that a Saxon called Hereward had in the eleventh century owned a small part of the lordship of Bourne, decided to adopt him as ancestor and to identify him with the famous hero. For this purpose a pedigree was forged conferring titles, ancestors, and descendants upon the Hereward who had lived at Bourne, and to make this pedigree more convincing there was conferred upon Hereward the hero the hitherto unheard-of cognomen of "the Wake." There are some obscurities in the story, but the following facts seem certain: that Hereward was never called "the Wake" till he was adopted as ancestor by the Wakes about the middle of the fourteenth century; that the Wakes have no traceable connection with Hereward or any other Saxon; and that the first Wake,

¹ *The Ancestor*, vol. i, p. 237.

to be christened "Hereward" was born in 1851.¹ Hereward the Saxon hero *may* have been a real person, but the fact that among his exploits are narrated the slaughter of a gigantic bear in Scotland, and of a great champion, the lover of the king's daughter, in Cornwall, with other obviously mythical feats in Ireland and Flanders,² suggests that he was a mythical hero after whom Hereward of Bourne and other Saxons were named.

"The study of genealogy," says Dr. Round,³ "is rich in illustration of the mental perversity of man, of his 'mis-directed toil, of his self-deception.'" It is astonishing how many distinguished men have not merely employed pedigree-fakers, but have taken a hand in the game themselves. Thus we find even Lord Burghley, perhaps England's greatest statesman, tampering with documents in the hope of inducing people to believe that his great-grandfather, whose name and identity were and still are unknown, was the scion of an illustrious line, and Mr. Oswald Barron⁴ has amusingly shown how prone literary men have been to boast of fictitious pedigrees and to assume coats of arms to which they had no shadow of a claim. His list of offenders includes Montaigne, Spenser, Browning, Carlyle, Dickens, Victor Hugo, and Tennyson.

Dr. Round sums up the question by saying that "to 'the advocates of historical methods the word 'tradition' excites no reverence, for we know that those who 'appeal to it do so in default of any proof for the 'origin they seek to claim . . . there is, perhaps, no 'authority' so unworthy of credit.'"⁵

It is to be regretted that the works of Dr. Round seem totally unknown to our classical scholars. No

¹ These facts are to be found in *D.N.B.*, s.v. "Hereward"; J. H. Round, *Feudal England*, p. 161; *The Ancestor*, vol. ii, pp. 109-13.

² G. L. Gomme, *Folklore as an Historical Science*, p. 36.

³ *The Ancestor*, vol. ii, p. 165.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 187-90.

⁵ J. H. Round, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.

one who had read even a few pages of them could write, as Professor Myres writes,¹ "As long as personal names succeed each other in a pedigree . . . there is "a presumption that the family itself knew what it was "talking about." Even the feeblest of the hundreds of pedigree-fakers whose efforts have been exposed by Dr. Round and his colleagues never failed to make personal names, of a sort, succeed each other. In his attempt to deduce a system of chronology from the Greek "traditional" pedigrees, Professor Myres has compared them to the English pedigrees going back to those who came over "with the Conqueror,"² and has thereby shown clearly that his theories have no foundation in fact. He has, however, carried the art of believing just so much as theory requires less far than Mr. Burn, who tells us that "we have five apparently "trustworthy pedigrees claiming to go back to the "Heroic Age, and though we may feel compelled to "doubt their claims in one case to descent from a god "and in the other four from famous legendary heroes, "the number of generations in each pedigree may give "us a clue to the date at which settled life began again "after the migrations."³ To doubt a man's claim to divine descent and at the same time to regard his pedigree as trustworthy is really an amazing feat. That pedigree faking was not unknown to the Greeks is the opinion of Professor Halliday, who says that "there is "not a great deal of history to be got out of the Argive "genealogies. There are many alternative versions, "and, as I think is clear from the second book of "Pausanias, a good deal of manipulation was applied "to them in antiquity."⁴

If Dr. Farnell is right; the ancient Athenians had no genuine genealogy, or idea of genealogy, at all. Discussing the cult of the *Tritopatores*, he tells us that

¹ J. L. Myres, *Who Were the Greeks?*, p. 299.

² *Ibid.*, p. 300.

³ A. R. Burn, *Minoans, Philistines, and Greeks*, p. 49.

⁴ W. R. Halliday, *Indo-European Folk-tales and Greek Legend*,

their name clearly reveals them as "fathers of the third 'degree back,' and thus bears the stamp of primitiveness upon it, for 'third degree' was an early expression "of an indefinite remoteness of ancestral affinity. "Inscriptions suggest that each Attic phratry, kinship "being in each the nominal bond of association, "sacrificed to their own Tritopatores, as a vague group "of fathers of the kindred."¹

However this may be, we need go no farther than Wales to see the futility of basing any chronological scheme upon traditional pedigrees. Thus "the date of "Teithfallt, the *seventeenth* descendant from Llyr "Llediath in one line, is A.D. 430; while that of Cystennin Goronog, the *ninth* descendant in another line, "is A.D. 542." Similarly the date of Iorwerth Hirflawdd, *ninth* in descent from Aflech, is A.D. 430, while the date of Cunedda Wledig, *seventeenth* in descent from Aflech in another line, is A.D. 400.² If in the first case we take an average of thirty years to a generation for one pedigree, we have our choice of nine or sixty-nine years to a generation for the other!

It is not only in the matter of chronology that Welsh pedigrees show themselves to be fictitious. One of the most celebrated is that of Brychan, eponym of Brecon. He is alleged to have had twenty-four sons and twenty-six daughters, of whom all the former and half the latter were saints. Many of them founded churches in various remote parts of the Celtic world, and several were martyred by pagan Saxons at places which, so far as is known, pagan Saxons can never have reached. In addition to this Welsh family, he had another large family of saints in Devon and Cornwall.³ The most determined efforts have failed to give Brychan and his progeny the remotest appearance of historical probability.

¹ L. R. Farnell, *Greek Hero Cults*, p. 333. It must be added that this explanation of the Tritopatores is regarded as extremely doubtful by Professor H. J. Rose.

² R. Rees, *Welsh Saints*, p. 91.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 136 seq.

The Saxon pedigrees are equally unreliable. Thus that of the West Saxon kings would make Woden a real man who flourished about A.D. 200; while that of the kings of Kent would bring him down to about A.D. 350. The name of the Kaiser, that is the Roman Emperor of the East, became so famous that the East Anglian kings adopted him as their ancestor and made him the son of Woden.¹

Nor can we trust the Icelandic pedigrees. The *Landnamabok* professes to give an accurate account of the settlement of Iceland, and of the early settlers, yet Koht tells us² that "in several cases we are able to "prove that the pedigrees given by the *Landnamabok* "are absolutely fictitious."

How this may have come about is explained by Professor Gronbech, who shows that, among the early Teutons, any person, whether real or mythical, whose luck the clan believed itself to have acquired, by marriage with or adoption of a descendant of the lucky one or in any other way, was regarded as a clan ancestor, and concludes that "to understand the clan "feeling and clan system of ancient times we must "revise our ideas of kinship altogether, and replace our "genealogical tree by other images. . . . We cannot "get history in our sense by comparing related genealogies and synchronizing their data into our chronological system."³ This impossibility is just what the early investigators in Polynesia thought that they could achieve. The Polynesians, and especially the Maoris, have enormously long traditional pedigrees, and by the aid of these a pseudo-history of Polynesia, extending back for thousands of years, was built up by Percy Smith and others. This pseudo-history, however, is now beginning to be recognized as such. Even Professor P. Buck, who is a Maori with a long traditional pedigree of his own, is constrained to admit that "interruptions by conquest and death, varying aca-

¹ For this fact see R. W. Chambers, *Widsith*, p. 192.

² *The Old Norse Sagas*, p. 35.

³ W. Gronbech, *The Culture of the Teutons*, pp. 374-5.

"demic knowledge and ability, and the limitations of "human memory, diminish the scientific value of "orally transmitted genealogies and traditions as "means of obtaining exact dates."¹

But the would-be chronologist has still other dangers to guard against. In China, so Mr. Waley tells us, "So long as the Ancestors . . . were conceived of as former kings of a particular tribe, they could exist in popular imagination side by side, floating in a vague past. But when the idea of Empire arose, and it was asserted as a justification of an Imperialist policy that the Chou, for example, once ruled over everything under Heaven, having conquered the Yin, who also ruled the world, it was no longer possible to place a mighty and venerated ancestor such as Yao at the same period as the Yin or Chou 'empires,' and thus make him a subject of Yin or Chou. To bring him down to the historical period was obviously impossible, and the only alternative was to give him the vacant space previous to the dominance of the Yin. . . . The Yellow Ancestor was an even later comer, and had consequently to be accommodated 'behind' Yao, in an even more remote corner of prehistory. Thus the chronology was built up backwards, and has no relation whatever with an actual time sequence."² We may probably detect a similar process, namely the combination of independent tribal heroes into a single genealogical scheme, in the Old Testament, and in Ancient Greece and Ancient Ireland.

Some pedigrees drawn up on these lines are obviously fabulous. Thus Miss Durham cites an Albanian tribe, three of the five sub-tribes of which claim descent from three brothers who fled from the east. One had a saddle (*shala*) and became ancestor of the Shala tribe; another had a winnowing sieve (*shoshi*) and became the ancestor of the Shoshi tribe; the third had nothing, so he said, "*Mir dit*" (good-day), and

¹ *Man*, 1933, p. 136.

² A. Waley, *The Way and its Power*, p. 134.

went off to become the ancestor of the Mirdita tribe (or three-fifths of it).¹

I must now discuss briefly the question whether the modern savage can remember his pedigree for more than four generations back. Sir William Ridgeway believed that he can. He says² that "the natives of the "Torres Straits keep a kind of diary or record by "means of cords or knots. By such artificial contri- "vances it was possible to keep an exact account of the "number of generations, even though the name of one "ancestor might be forgotten or blundered, a thing not "very likely among people who had no other literature "to distract their thoughts." He does not say for how long or what purpose these pedigrees were kept, and when he assures us later³ that "pedigrees can be "remembered with extraordinary accuracy by primi- "tive people," he omits to mention that no such pedigree has ever been checked.

Professor Lévy-Bruhl, on the other hand, believes that savage ancestors may be divided into two classes, the real ancestors, consisting of the last four generations, and the mythical ancestors, a body of super-human, partly animal beings, who are the creators of all species and all rites.⁴ This view is confirmed, so far as Australasia is concerned, by what Dr. Fortune tells us of the islanders of Dobu, 300 miles east of the Torres Straits. It appears that the inhabitants of each Dobuan village trace their pedigree back to a common ancestress, who is not a human being but a bird. None know their pedigree for more than four generations back, and an informant said that his great-great-grandmother was hatched from a parrot's egg.⁵

¹ M. E. Durham, *Some Tribal Origins, etc., of the Balkans*, pp. 25, 29. Yet she says (p. 27) that certain Albanians have no tradition of descent from the ancient Dalmatians, and must therefore be later immigrants; by this argument people with no traditional pedigree can have no ancestors at all!

² W. Ridgeway, *Early Age of Greece*, vol. i, p. 130.

³ Ibid., p. 151.

⁴ *Congrès International*, 1934, p. 269.

⁵ R. E. Fortune, *The Sorcerers of Dobu*, p. 31.

While the beliefs of the Africans may not be quite the same, I am convinced that their genuine pedigrees are no longer. Sir Samuel Baker visited the Lotuko of the Upper Nile in the early 'sixties, and in his account of them given in his *The Albert Nyanza* he mentions a number of chiefs and incidents. When I was there fifty years later I tried to identify these, and though I could not get the names as given by Baker, I managed to identify them in what at the time I considered a satisfactory manner.¹ But when some years later Professor and Mrs. Seligman visited the district, and produced quite different identifications,² I considered the facts more carefully, and came to the conclusion that the events which we had attributed to Baker's time really happened much later, probably in the 'nineties, and that Baker and the events of his time were completely forgotten. I may add that Ngalamitiko, a hero whose name is associated with myths and miracles, is said to have lived only four or five generations ago. My opinion is confirmed by what Mr. Huntingford says of the not far distant Nandi, namely that the first date in their history which can be fixed is 1890, and that a chief who is supposed to have ruled as recently as 1870 is now "a somewhat shadowy 'figure,'" which I take to mean that it is doubtful whether he really existed or not.³

That fictitious pedigrees are common in Africa there can be no doubt. Dr. C. K. Meek tells me that in West Africa the inhabitants of a village group often claim that the inhabitants of the various villages are in each case descended from a son of the first settler, but that an examination shows that many of them came from various foreign localities in quite recent times. "The 'legend of a common ancestry is pure invention to 'promote a feeling of solidarity or in some cases to 'explain the fact that the group is an exogamous unit.'" The Nuers and Dinkas are Nilotic tribes of the Sudan, and Dr. Evans-Pritchard found that Dinkas who have

¹ S.N.R., vol. i, p. 154.

² Ibid., vol. viii, p. 4.

³ *Man*, 1935, 158.

been adopted into the clans of their Nuer conquerors give pedigrees showing pure Nuer descent.¹ The process is similar to that by which converts to Judaism become pure-blooded descendants of Abraham.

We thus see arrayed in defence of false genealogy the powerful forces of religion and patriotism; of custom and tradition; of family pride and individual vanity; and of Euhemerism and rationalization; not to mention the popular love of the marvellous and the romantic. On the other side are only the puny and disunited columns of critical investigation. It is not surprising that, although hundreds of them have been proved false and none has ever been proved true, the traditional pedigrees still hold the field.

¹ *S.N.R.*, vol. xvi, p. 52.

CHAPTER III

LOCAL TRADITION

THE local tradition is, perhaps, less a matter of faith than the traditional pedigree, but it supplies even more evidence than the latter of the indifference to fact, and the complete lack of any critical faculty, which characterized most people, even those who are supposed to have been educated.

There are various ways in which a local tradition, so called, comes into existence. In the first place there is to be found, in most rural areas, some clergyman or schoolmaster with a smattering of history or archaeology who enjoys speculating about the past and invariably ends, if he does not begin, by regarding himself as a more than sufficient authority for his own statements. He is regarded as the expert, and nobody dreams of questioning what he says, or of checking it with even the most readily accessible works of reference.

Then there is the person who seeks to add interest and romance to a house or a neighbourhood by transferring to it some story which he, or more often she, has heard or read in some other connection. The lady's story or the vicar's statement may gain a temporary vogue, and being taken down from the lips of some rustic by a collector of folklore or local historian, be accepted as a piece of genuine "folk-memory."

Then there is the snowball type of story, which grows as it goes. The process is somewhat as follows:

Stage I.—"This house dates from Elizabethan times, and since it lies close to the road which the Virgin Queen must have taken when travelling from 'X to Y, it may well have been visited by her.'

Stage II.—"This house is said to have been visited by Queen Elizabeth on her way from X to Y"

Stage III.—"The state bedroom is over the entrance.

"It is this room which Queen Elizabeth probably "occupied when she broke her journey here on her way "from X to Y."

Stage IV.—"According to a local tradition, the truth of which there is no reason to doubt, the bed in "the room over the entrance is that in which Queen "Elizabeth slept, when she broke her journey here on "her way from X to Y."

A man whom I asked how he knew that Queen Elizabeth had slept in his house, asked in return, in a surprised and indignant tone, "Why shouldn't she "have?" The idea that it might be desirable, or even possible, to verify the statement had obviously never occurred to him.

To make a pageant at Cardiff more interesting, the promoters brought the Emperor Constantine to Cardiff. I remarked to a friend, an exceptionally well-read man, that of course the Emperor Constantine was never there, to which he replied, "Oh, I expect he was "if they say he was!" The visit of Constantine to Cardiff may now be becoming a "tradition."

I recently met with another possible "tradition" in the making. A friend bought a house which is said to have been the scene of a fight in the Civil War. The only authority, a doubtful one, gives no description of the fight, yet my friend had not been long installed before he was able to describe to us how the Royalists attacked, and how they were repulsed.

I had a similar experience in my own house, which was visited by Sir Thomas Fairfax during the siege of Raglan Castle. Returning after it had been let for a number of years, I found that a "tradition," quite unknown to my family, had grown up to the effect that Lady Fairfax had crept out of a certain window to warn the defenders of Raglan Castle of an impending attack. There is, in fact, no tradition about the house at all. Charles Heath, the local antiquary, who visited it about 1800, when it was used as a farm, says, "The "Writer has endeavoured to obtain in the neighbour- "hood Some Anecdote of the conclusion of this busi-

"ness, as well as of the parties who met here, and "signed the Treaty;"—but such is the oblivion in "which the transactions are involved, that even the "Mansion House is little known in the county; and, "with regard to its *eventful history*, many otherwise "well-informed persons, of whom he made inquiry, "seemed *surprised* when acquainted with the *motives* "for his curiosity."¹ So much for "folk-memory." I may add that the window through which Lady Fairfax is alleged to have crept is in a part of the house which was built about 1860.

At a house between Hereford and Abergavenny is shown a room in which King Charles I is alleged to have slept. The itineraries show, however, that on the only occasion on which he travelled from Hereford to Abergavenny he completed the journey in the day, and dined at a house the way to which must have taken him far from the house in question.

At Monmouth is shown the window at which Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote his history. It is, however, highly improbable that he wrote anything at Monmouth,² and anyhow the window dates from the fifteenth century, whereas Geoffrey died in the twelfth.

Some time in the nineteenth century a local antiquary identified the motte of the Norman castle at Trelleck as a Roman signal mound. There seems to be no doubt whatever that the mound is not older than the eleventh century, or the story of its Roman origin than the nineteenth, but nevertheless the latter has become a well-attested local tradition, and on it have been based elaborate and purely fictitious accounts of the Roman campaigns against the Silures.

Wherever such stories are told and can be checked, they prove to be fictitious. A bed in Cardiganshire, traditionally that in which King Henry VII slept on his way to Bosworth Field, proved to be of the eighteenth century.

¹ C. Heath, *Historical and Descriptive Accounts*.

² E. K. Chambers, *Arthur of Britain*, p. 24.

The room in Fyvie Castle, Aberdeenshire, allotted by tradition to King Edward I, is in the Preston Tower, which was built in the fifteenth century.¹

To go farther afield, Dr. C. K. Meek tells me that "the sacred sword of the Bolewa chiefs (of Nigeria) "was, according to tradition, brought by the tribal leaders from the Yemen many hundreds of years ago. "The sword was shown to me secretly and permission "given to remove the rust. It had a Prussian stamp!" With this may be compared the chain-armour of the Sudanese Arabs, traditionally captured from the Crusaders, but really imported from Germany in the eighteenth century.²

Sometimes the anachronism is the other way round, that is to say, that tradition associates local features with people who lived long after their construction. It is, for example, universally believed by the Irish peasants that the raths or hill-forts are the work of the Danes, though they really date from a much earlier period.³ The inhabitants of Southern India⁴ refer everything prehistoric to Tippoo Sultan, who was killed in 1799, and in many parts of the Continent of Europe buildings, ruins, weapons, bones, etc., of earlier date are referred to the armies of Napoleon.⁵

There is near Megara a peak from which, according to local tradition, Xerxes on his throne watched the Battle of Salamis. An investigator found on the top of the peak a rock-cut throne, but so placed that any-one sitting in it would have his back to Salamis.⁶ The author of the "tradition" had obviously heard of, but not seen, the throne.

Another type of anachronism appears in the Westphalian legend which tells how the Catholic Charle-

¹ D. MacGibbon and T. Ross, *The Architecture of Scotland*, vol. ii, p. 355.

² A. E. Robinson, in *Man*, 1935, p. 74.

³ W. G. Wood-Martin, *Pagan Ireland*, p. 200.

⁴ According to Mr. F. J. Richards.

⁵ A. van Gennep, op. cit., p. 168.

⁶ A. B. Cook, op. cit., vol. i, p. 145.

magne, with the aid of a big iron cannon, defeated the Lutheran Swedes.¹

Local tradition is not merely anachronistic. Miss M. E. Durham tells me that on Highgate Hill there is a stone at which Dick Whittington is supposed to have heard the bells and turned again, but that *Dick Whittington* has been locally corrupted into the *Duke of Wellington*, and that someone was recently told that the stone marked the place where the Duke of Wellington had said "Turn again!" and won the battle! One can imagine a historian of the future, if his mentality resembled that of many historians of the past, getting hold of this "tradition," and basing upon it an account of a previously unrecorded campaign of the Duke against the Chartists.

Where tradition does not arise from such blunders, it is usually the result of ignorance and superstition. Thus Krappe tells us that "the dolmens of France and "the British Isles are the work of fairies; the remains "of the Roman limes are attributed by German "peasants to the Devil, who divided the earth with "Our Lord, and erected the wall to mark the boundary. "The ruins of the Roman amphitheatres of Southern "France are called the 'palais de Gallienne,' Gallienne "being a powerful Moorish princess and the wife of "Charlemagne. To the fellahin of modern Egypt the "pyramids are the work of the jinn."²

Those who believe that Cæsar's Camp was constructed by Cæsar are morally bound to believe that the Devil's Dyke was constructed by the Devil. Cæsar's Camp in Sussex, excavated by General Pitt-Rivers, proved to be of Norman origin.³

It is not merely peasants who believe in fables. Miss Caton-Thompson has proved conclusively⁴ what was not really in doubt, namely, that the ruins of Zim-

¹ A. van Gennep, op. cit., p. 167.

² A. H. Krappe, *The Science of Folklore*, p. 75.

³ H. St. G. Gray, in *Handbook to the Pitt-Rivers Museum, Farnham*, p. 20.

⁴ G. Caton-Thompson, *The Zimbabwe Culture*.

babwe, in Rhodesia, are not older than the ninth century of our era, and there is much evidence to connect the culture of its builders with that of Java.¹ Many educated people, however, continue to believe in its fabled construction by King Solomon, merely because they like to do so, and because the truth is "so 'dull,'" an expression that I have often heard applied to it.

Even archæologists are not above reproach. The most elaborately carved rock-dwelling at Petra is known to the local Arabs as Pharaoh's Treasury, but since Petra is notoriously post-Pharaonic, this tradition is quietly ignored. A similar tradition is, however, called in to support the identification of Ahab's Palace at Samaria.²

"History's greatest foe," says a writer in the *Sunday Times*,³ "is not science, but that form of local tradition "which supplies gaps in our knowledge with the "wildest guesses, which too frequently deceive with a "plausible tale." The writer is referring to *Erinus Alpinus*, a plant which the local historians allege to have been introduced to the region of the Roman Wall by Spanish soldiers in the Roman army, but which was in fact introduced by a nineteenth-century vicar.

It is not only local historians who make guesses. Sir Laurence Gomme says that "perhaps the 'White 'Horse Stone' at Aylesford, in Kent, the legend of "which is that one who rode a beast of this description "was killed at or about this spot, may take us back to "the great battle at Crayford, where Horsa was "killed."⁴ We may believe that Horsa never died, since he never lived, or we may, if we think fit, believe that he fell at "Aegelesthrep," as the *Chronicle* says, but for such guesses there is no justification. Dozens of kings, and hundreds of other eminent men, have met their death in various parts of England; Harold

¹ J. Hornell, in *J.R.A.I.*, 1934, pp. 305 seq.

² *Man*, 1932, 249.

³ December 31, 1933.

⁴ G. L. Gomme, *Folklore as an Historical Science*, p. 43.

fell on the field of Hastings, Simon de Montfort at Evesham, Richard III at Bosworth Field; their deaths marked epochs in our history, yet who knows the spot where they fell? Nobody, since tradition never preserves historical facts. Anyone who attempted to supplement our knowledge of the Civil War by making inquiries among the inhabitants of Marston Moor or Naseby would be foredoomed to failure, yet Gomme and many others can believe that while the memory of events three centuries old is completely lost, that of events fifteen centuries old is miraculously preserved.

The fact is that all history, except in so far as it has been recorded, or as it can be recovered by archæologists, is completely lost. "Wales," says Sir John Rhys, "is dotted with many a *caer* and many a *dinas*, the "ancient name of which is now unknown."¹ If even the names are lost, can it be seriously supposed that the facts have been preserved? In Monmouthshire nearly all the castles have names, but of most of them very little is known, and nothing that has not been placed on record.

Asked if he knew anything about a certain dolmen, a native of East Africa told the inquirer that "the "people say that it is the work of spirits. It has been "like that for a long, long time. Even the oldest man "cannot remember the time when it was not there."²

Caldicot Castle has been for six centuries the most conspicuous feature of the landscape of South Monmouthshire. According to Mr. Wheatley Cobb,³ it belonged to Edward Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, executed in 1521, and was probably sacked and dismantled after his fall; yet in 1613 a jury at a Court of Survey presented that "there is an old ancient castle at "Caldicot and that it is in ruin and decay, but the "cause of the decay thereof they cannot present, for "it was before the memory of this jury or any of them." In Europe and in Africa the story is the same: "We

¹ *The Arthurian Legend*, p. 351 n.

² Quoted by E. Evans-Pritchard in *Antiquity*, 1935, p. 159.

³ *The Story of Caldicot Castle*, p. 30.

"know nothing about that. It happened before our time."

Near Nemi, in Italy, of *Golden Bough* fame, formerly stood a colossal oak, which was said to have been planted by Augustus, and the hollow trunk of which was large enough to hold twenty-five persons. It is mentioned by several writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and was then apparently one of the wonders of Italy. It was cut down about 1790, and in 1912 an inquirer found that the local inhabitants had lost all memory of it.¹

From time to time there have been discovered in the forests of South-Eastern Asia, deserted cities, temples, etc., and it has frequently been found that the nearest local inhabitants were completely ignorant, not merely of their history, but even of their existence. A striking example is given by Mr. Hornell, who tells us² that "The schist belt that runs through the Raichur Doab "in Hyderabad State is honeycombed with the ramifications of ancient shafts and tunnellings made by "miners in extracting gold . . . the amount of gold "extracted must have been enormous. Strangely "enough, no memory survives in the district of aught "pertaining to these old gold mines, of whose existence "the local people were actually unaware until they "were discovered by European prospectors." Mr. Hornell tells me that these workings reach, in places, a depth of 640 feet, and must, according to the experts, have taken an incalculable period, many centuries at least.

Such evidence as I have been able to collect, then, shows firstly that the alleged historical facts embodied in local tradition are not facts at all, and secondly, that the real facts of history are never preserved by local tradition. Some distinguished writers have, however, attempted to prove the contrary, and it is interesting to compare Gomme's tale of buried treasure with the facts about the old gold workings which I have

¹ A. B. Cook, *Zeus*, vol. ii, p. 419.

² *J.R.A.I.*, 1934, p. 331 n.

just quoted. He tells us¹ that there was a tradition of buried treasure in the valley of the Ribble, in Lancashire, and that this treasure was found at Cuerdale in 1840. He goes on to say that it was the treasure-chest of the Danes, who raided Mercia in 911, but were followed up by the English king and thoroughly defeated. This story received the blessing of Andrew Lang, who wrote that "the theory . . . quite accounts "for the presence of the hoard where it was found. "The Danish rearguard defending the line of the "Darwen would know that their treasure was hurried "forward and probably concealed, but would not "know the exact spot." Yet the story is demonstrably untrue. It is not merely that the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* gives us no reason to suppose that the fight took place in Lancashire and that the *Chronicle of Ethelwerd* places it on the Severn,² at least eighty miles from Cuerdale; Gomme's eagerness to believe was such that it caused him to overlook a fact which he himself mentions, namely, that more than a third of the hoard consisted of coins of Canute, who did not come to the throne until more than a century after the fight in question.

Another firm believer in the historicity of tradition was Sir William Ridgeway, who gives the following as an example: "In 1884 two of the descendants of "Prittie's troopers sought a reduction of rent from "Lord Dunalley, Prittie's descendant. In the Land "Court an old farmer named Armitage gave evidence "of the customs etc. of the estate. He stated that he "was 92, that he remembered his grandfather, and that "his grandfather had talked with some of the men who "came with Cromwell. He was cross-examined, but "the Court was convinced of his veracity. There was "thus but one step in oral tradition between 1651 and "1884. Although these troopers were mostly young "men when they settled in Ireland, yet each of them "must have known in his English home those who were

¹ Op. cit., p. 30.

² J. A. Giles, *Six Old English Chronicles*, p. 38.

"old enough in 1588 to remember the coming of the "Spanish Armada. . . . Thus between 1588 and 1884, "that is nearly three centuries, there were but two "steps in the tradition. But at Rome the same space of "time would take us back to 690 B.C., that is to the "traditional reign of Numa Pompilius."¹ Sir William failed to note that the Court was not concerned with the Spanish Armada, and that we are given no reason to believe that Mr. Armitage, or his grandfather, or even Prittie's troopers, had ever heard of it. From the historical point of view the story proves nothing whatever, and both it and the previous story suggest that a belief in the historicity of tradition is the outcome of a wish to believe rather than of a critical study of the facts.

I shall now consider local traditions of a different type—the type, that is to say, where a story is told over a wide area, but is localized at various places. Let us begin with the "Faithful Hound." The Faithful Hound is best known in this country from its association with Beddgelert, in Carnarvonshire. The name "Beddgelert" seems to mean "the grave of Celert," Celert being a legendary saint. There was, however, an English version of the story in which the Faithful Hound was called "Kill-hart," and it would seem that some etymologist of the eighteenth century, probably influenced by a local legend which told how the inhabitants had cheated the Devil by substituting a dog for a man,² identified Kill-hart with Gelert. The story thus started was reinforced by the enterprise of an innkeeper, who about 1830 set up a tombstone at a suitable spot, and grew rapidly into a tradition which was accepted as genuine by thousands, not merely of the ignorant but of the learned.³ Baring-Gould⁴ traced this story in various forms to many parts of

¹ W. Ridgeway, *The Early Age of Greece*, vol. ii, p. 231.

² G. L. Gomme, op. cit., p. 26.

³ J. Jacobs, *Celtic Fairy Tales*, pp. 261-4.

⁴ S. Baring-Gould, *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages*, pp. 134 seq.

Europe, Asia, and Africa, and more recently Mr. A. H. A. Simcox¹ found, installed in a temple in Central India, an idol in the form of a dog which was explained by a similar story.

In case, however, it might be supposed that the story of the Faithful Hound, though false at Beddgelert, was probably true somewhere else, I shall now consider another wide-spread form of local tradition, and one which could not possibly be true anywhere—the story of the Sleeping Warriors. The story, as told in many parts of Europe, is that beneath a neighbouring mountain there is a cave, and that in the cave a number of armed men are lying asleep, waiting for the day when they shall be called upon to rise and deliver their country from some enemy. A man entering the cave by chance rings a bell or makes some other noise, whereupon the warriors spring to their feet, exclaiming, "Is it time?" "The time is not yet," replies the leader, whereupon they all lie down again.

The leader, in Wales, may be Arthur, Owen Lawgoch, or Owen Glendower; in Scotland he may be Finn, Bruce, or nameless; in Ireland, Garry Geerlaug, Earl Gerald, The O'Donoghue, or nameless. In Germany he may be Odin, Dietrich, Siegfried, Charlemagne, Frederick Barbarossa, or the Emperor Otto; in Bohemia King Wentzel, in Serbia King Marko, in Spain the Cid. There are many others, both in Europe and beyond; most, if not all, of them have been found by a chance intruder, but the latter has never succeeded in finding the entrance to the cave a second time.²

Sir John Rhys attempts to rationalize some of these stories, and in so doing misses their point. "To take "Garry Geerlaug, for instance, a roving Norseman as "we may suppose from his name, who may have "suddenly disappeared with his followers, never

¹ *Man*, 1932, 9.

² S. Baring-Gould, op. cit., p. 105; J. Rhys, *Celtic Folklore*, vol. ii, p. 492; E. K. Chambers, *Arthur of Britain*, p. 225; A. van Gennep, op. cit., p. 196.

"more to be heard of, in the east of Ireland. In the absence of certain news of his death, it was all the easier to imagine that he was dozing quietly away in "an enchanted fortress." It is, I should have thought, much easier to imagine that someone who has disappeared is dead, rather than that he is dozing away in an enchanted fortress, but the point is that the story is not told in Norway or Iceland, where Garry's disappearance may be supposed to have caused regret, but by Irish peasants in the neighbourhood of Ardee, co. Louth, where Garry is believed still to lie asleep in his enchanted fortress. Sir John later admits, however,¹ that in the story of how Arthur lies asleep at Caerleon and elsewhere "Arthur has taken the place "of some ancient divinity," and that the story is linked with "the beliefs of the Latter-day Saints as to "the coming of Christ to reign on earth."

Two things are clear; the first is that these stories cannot have any basis in historical fact, and the second is that since the versions told in the various countries are almost word for word the same, they cannot possibly have arisen in the places where they are now told, but must be derived from a common source. This applies to the Faithful Hound no less than to the Sleeping Warriors.

And now, what is the explanation of these stories? I shall try to show as this book goes on that all traditional narratives originate in ritual, and shall discuss in detail many aspects of the question. Here I shall be content to suggest lines along which the solution of these two particular problems may perhaps be found. I am inclined to believe that the story of the Faithful Hound is a reminiscence of a rite, similar to that described in Genesis xxii, by which a pretence is made of sacrificing a child, and an animal substituted at the last moment. The mourning for the dog, and the praise lavished upon it, may be part of a ceremony intended to identify it with the child, or to convince the powers-that-be that although they are not getting

¹ J. Rhys, op. cit., p. 493.

a child they are really getting something just as valuable.

The Sleeping Warriors are more difficult to explain, yet the features of the story—the recumbent warriors, the enthroned leader, the concerted movement and chorused question—all suggest ritual. Is there any known ritual with which we can compare them? In the highlands of Fiji, so Sir James Frazer tells us,¹ there was a point in the boys' initiation ritual at which the novices were taken to the sacred enclosure. There they saw a row of men lying on the ground, covered with blood, and with their entrails protruding. The novices had to crawl over these bodies till they reached the High Priest, who sat at the far end. The High Priest suddenly uttered a yell, whereupon the corpses sprang to their feet and ran down to the river to wash off the pigs' blood, with which they had been smeared. This rite has at least four features in common with the story of the Sleeping Warriors—the recumbent men, the seated leader, the frightened intruders, and the sudden resurrection. Elsewhere in Fiji "the novices "also go and visit the cave where the dead nobles are "buried to find a conch which is hidden there."² Here we have the cave and also the horn, which, as we shall see, is a feature of several of the Sleeping Warrior stories. Professor Hocart tells us that the object of the whole ritual is to enable the novices to impersonate the departed ancestors.³ He also shows that all initiation rites are more or less degenerate forms of coronation rites, that is to say, rites attendant upon the installation of a king or queen.⁴ If that is so, and if our comparison is justified, then the story of the Sleeping Warriors is connected with a coronation ritual, a ritual intended to qualify the new king to impersonate the old king. Is there anything in the stories to suggest any connection with coronation? Beneath the castle of

¹ *Golden Bough*, vol. xi, p. 245.

² A. M. Hocart, *Kingship*, p. 137.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

Sewingshields, in Northumberland, sleeps King Arthur with all his court, until someone blows the horn which lies ready on a table and cuts a garter placed beside it with a sword of stone. Once a farmer, knitting on the ruins, followed his clue of wool, which had fallen into a crevice, and found the vault. He cut the garter and Arthur woke, but, as he sheathed the sword, fell asleep again with the words :—

“O woe betide that evil day
On which this witless wight was born,
Who drew the sword, the garter cut,
But never blew the bugle horn.”

In another version Arthur says that, if the visitant will blow the horn and draw the sword, he will “confer upon him the honours of knighthood, to last through time.”

A similar adventure befell one Potter Thompson in the ruins of Richmond Castle, in Yorkshire. He was dismissed by King Arthur with the words :—

“Potter Thompson, Potter Thompson, hadst thou blown the
horn,
Thou hadst been the greatest man that ever was born.”¹

What is suggested in the first story, and stated in the second, is that the intruder, if he performs the ritual correctly, will himself become king. The whole story of the Sleeping Warriors, then, taken in conjunction with the material from Fiji (and certain facts which we shall come to in Chapter XIV), suggests a ritual in the course of which the candidate for kingship entered a cave, in which the courtiers were lying in feigned death about the corpse of the late king, and, after certain rites had been performed, emerged in the character of the old king resurrected.

There is no reason to suppose that such a ritual was ever performed in Europe. It seems far more probable that the belief was imported, and localized wherever there was a suitable site and a suitable hero. It seems to have influenced Christian ideas, since in mediæval

¹ E. K. Chambers, op. cit., p. 224. The clue of wool is reminiscent of the Labyrinth.

pictures of Christ's resurrection the sepulchre is often surrounded by sleeping warriors, in defiance of the story as told in the Gospels.

As this book goes on, I shall deal with a large number of traditional stories, and shall try to show that all of them, in so far as they are really traditional, are of ritual origin. Of most of these stories it is alleged that they are founded on fact, the theory apparently being that if only nine-tenths of a story can be shown to be untrue, we are bound to accept the remaining tenth as genuine history. Here we have a story for which nobody can claim a basis in fact. No rational person can believe that kings who lived centuries ago are really sleeping in caves, or that anyone ever met with an adventure such as that attributed to Potter Thompson. If one traditional tale, told as a tale of fact, is completely devoid of fact, then the belief that such stories must have a historical basis is clearly ill-founded. I do not suggest, of course, that such stories as that of the Roman signal mound are based on ritual. That is a mere blunder, and many so-called traditions are, as I have tried to show, the result of such blunders or of deliberate fiction. It is not easy to tell the sham from the genuine, since both speculation and fiction tend to move along traditional lines, and since, as Professor Halliday has shown, "even legends of known "antiquity may ultimately be derived from a laborious "invention based on garbled documents."¹ There is one test which may be applied, though it is not infallible; it is to ascertain whether the story is connected with a living superstition. To know whether Queen Elizabeth really slept at a certain house is of interest only to a handful of historians and antiquaries, but the idea of meeting Queen Elizabeth's ghost on the stairs will cause a thrill to millions. What interests them is not whether Queen Elizabeth *was* there, but whether she *is* there. A large proportion of traditional stories are ghost stories, and though many of them are modern inventions, yet the latter are mere imitations

¹ W. R. Halliday, *Folklore Studies*, p. 72.

of the genuine ones. Here again no rational person can believe that the stories have any foundation in fact, and here again I suggest a ritual origin. It may be that these stories go back to a time when the initiated men dressed up in white to represent the ancestral spirits, and it may be that this is the reason why the belief in ghosts is so prevalent among women. However this may be, there can be no doubt that traditional stories are very often told of places associated with supernatural beings, and also of wells, lakes, trees, rocks, megaliths, and other places and objects, natural or artificial, to which people are, or were, wont to resort for magical purposes of one kind or another. It seems at least doubtful whether any local tradition can survive without its associated superstition. The connection of local tradition with cult is well attested; its connection with historical fact is not attested at all.

CHAPTER IV

ROBIN HOOD

HAVING tried, I hope with some success, to show that the world of tradition is quite a different one from that of history, I shall next take a series of well-known traditional figures and shall show that there is no good reason to believe that any of them had an historical existence. The belief in their historicity is due partly to the false theories of tradition and history with which I have already dealt, and partly to the fact that, so far as I can learn, no previous writer has ever attempted to survey the field as a whole. Every writer on a particular tradition, or group of traditions, has always assumed the historicity of all the traditions which he has not studied; a writer on King Arthur will tell us that he is as historical as Achilles, and a writer on the *Iliad* that Achilles is as historical as the saga heroes. We are thus in a vicious circle. It is impossible to break this circle; it is impossible to show that King Arthur is a myth, as long as the numerous other heroes with whom he can be compared are regarded as historical, and the same applies to every other hero considered individually. The only method open is that which I propose to adopt, namely, to make a simultaneous attack upon all the heroes of tradition. In so doing I shall have to discuss questions with which it is impossible to be thoroughly acquainted without long specialized study. I shall therefore have to expose myself to the scorn of the pedants, who, as I know by experience, will regard the detection of some minor inaccuracy as a triumphant refutation of my case.

The traditional hero with whom I shall deal in this chapter is Robin Hood. I begin with him because he is supposed to have lived within historic times, so that in his case we are in an exceptionally favourable

position to trace the processes by which a hero of tradition becomes endowed with pseudo-historicity.

Robin Hood is alleged to have lived at various dates, from the twelfth to the fourteenth century. According to the most popular version of his career, he was a Saxon who fled into Sherwood Forest to escape the tyranny of the Normans. There he gathered about him a band of stout Saxons in like case, and lived a life of chivalrous adventure, robbing the rich and brutal Normans, and giving the proceeds of his robberies to the poor, oppressed Saxons. Endless attempts were made by the Sheriff of Nottingham to capture him and disperse his band, but all his attempts ended in failure, and Robin finally received a pardon from the King in person. According to this version, the king was Richard I, and Robin was born at Locksley in 1160, and died in 1247.

Let us consider this story before we turn to other versions. We may first note that Locksley, Robin's birthplace, is said to have been either in Nottinghamshire or in Yorkshire, but there seems to have been no place of that name in either county. Now to the personal names. The name "Robin" is, of course, a diminutive of "Robert"; I shall have more to say about this name presently, but here we may note that it is, so far as England is concerned, a purely Norman name. We come next to Little John; the name "John," though, of course, not of Norman origin, was introduced by the Normans, and "little," in its Saxon form, means, we are told, "mean, deceitful."¹ Little John is then a strange name for a Saxon hero. "Much" might be a Saxon name, but the names of Robin's other henchmen, William, George, Allen, Gilbert, are such as could never have been borne by Saxons while there was any distinction between Saxons and Normans. Another companion of Robin's was Friar Tuck, but the first friar did not land in England till 1224.

Then there is the long-bow. Robin and his men are all experts with this weapon, and the "clothyard shaft"

¹ W. W. Skeat, *Etymological Dictionary*.

figures in almost every story. But Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey tells us that though the Saxons knew the *short* bow, they made little use of it, and the Normans, though they used both the short bow and the crossbow, did not know the long-bow. The latter did not come unto use in England till the last quarter of the thirteenth century, and was first successfully employed in battle at Falkirk in 1298. "In the assize of arms 'fixed by Henry II in 1181, bows, whether short or 'long, are not alluded to as weapons of the period.'¹ And this when Robin Hood was twenty-one!

According to another version of the story, Robin was not a Saxon but a Norman nobleman, who either was by birth Earl of Huntingdon, or was so created by Richard I. Any one who consults a work of reference, however, will see that the earldom of Huntingdon was held from 1185 till 1216 by David of Scotland, brother of King William the Lion.

The attempt to give a date to Robin Hood seems not to be earlier than the sixteenth century. One of the earliest published poems, the *Mery Geste*, of Wynkyn de Worde, printed about 1500, associates Robin Hood not with King Richard, but with a King Edward, and another early ballad associates him with King Henry and Queen Catherine²; I shall come back to these facts later. The attribution to Robin of a date later than the reign of Richard I, though it has often been made, and though it makes the friar and the long-bow possible, is rendered difficult by the fact that by the beginning of the thirteenth century Robin Hood's name seems to have been already proverbial.³

Nor is his place of residence more certain than his date, since though bows, chairs, caps, and slippers said to have belonged to him are, or were, shown at various places in Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire, yet his traditional activities were by no means limited to those counties. He owns hills, rocks, caves, and wells

¹ Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey, *The Crossbow*, pp. 31-2.

² J. Ritson, *Robin Hood*, p. 170.

³ *Ibid.*, p. xxxiv.

in Lancashire, Derbyshire, Shropshire, Gloucestershire, and Somerset. His story has been localized not only in Sherwood Forest and in Yorkshire, but in Derbyshire, Cumberland, and also in Scotland. The place of his death, called variously Kirkley, Bricklies, etc., is located in Yorkshire and in Scotland, and his chief henchman, Little John, is said to have been buried at Hathersage in Derbyshire, at Pette in Morayshire, and at Dublin.

"In the parish of Halifax is an immense stone or "rock, supposed to be a druidical monument, there "called *Robin Hood's Penny-stone*, which he is said to "have used to pitch with at a mark for his amusement. "There is likewise another of these stones, of several "tons weight, which the country people will tell you "he threw off an adjoining hill with a spade as he was "digging. Everything of the marvellous kind being "attributed here to Robin Hood, as it is in Cornwall "to King Arthur."¹ "As proofs of his universal popularity," says the same writer,² "his stories and exploits "have been made the subject as well of various "dramatic exhibitions, as of innumerable poems, "rhymes, songs and ballads; he has given rise to divers "proverbs, and to swear by him, or by some of his "companions, seems to have been a usual practice; he "may be regarded as the patron of archery; and "though not actually canonized (a situation to which "the miracles wrought in his favour, as well in his life- "time as after his death, and the supernatural powers "he is, in some parts, supposed to have possessed, "give him an indisputable claim), he obtained the "principal distinction of sainthood, in having a "festival allotted to him, and solemn games instituted "in honour of his memory, which were celebrated to "the latter end of the sixteenth century; not by the "populace only, but by kings or princes and grave "magistrates, and that as well in Scotland as in Eng- "land; being considered in the former country as of "the highest political importance, and as essential to

¹ J. Ritson, op. cit., p. lxi.

² Ibid., p. xiii.

"the civil and religious liberties of the people, the "efforts of the government to suppress them frequently producing tumult and insurrection."

At Aberdeen in 1508 it was ordered by the provost and baillies that all persons who were able should be ready with green and yellow raiment, bows and arrows, to go with "Robyne Huyd and Litile Johnne" whenever these should require them,¹ and as late as 1577 the Scottish Parliament requested the King to prohibit plays of "Robin Hood, king of May" on the Sabbath.

Bishop Latimer, in his sixth sermon before King Edward VI, stated that he had given notice of his intention to preach at a certain church on the following day, being a holy day, but when he came there found the door of the church locked, and one of the parish said to him, "Sir, this is a busy day, we cannot hear "you; it is Robin Hood's day. The parish are gone "abroad to gather for Robin Hood, I pray you let "them not."

Robin Hood's day, then, was observed as a religious festival, yet he certainly was not a saint. Not only was he, according to tradition, a robber, but the victims of his robberies were usually ecclesiastics; in fact, as Ritson says,² he "seems to have held bishops, abbots, "priests and monks, in a word, all the clergy, regular "and secular, in decided aversion."

Who then was he? The answer is that he was the hero of a ritual drama. In the fifteenth century, and later, the May-day celebration was called "Robin "Hood's festival," and he was "one of the mythical "characters whom the populace was fond of persona- "ting in the semi-dramatic devices and morris-dances "performed at that season."³ In Scotland, as we have seen, he was as popular as in England, and in France Robin des Bois and Marion are found in the thirteenth century as characters in the Whitsuntide pastourelles, "the earliest and not the least charming of pastoral

¹ E. K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, vol. ii, p. 334.

² Op. cit., p. x.

³ D.N.B., s.v. "Robin Hood."

"comedies."¹ The facts that the name "Robin" is French in origin, and that we find "Robin des Bois" in France at such an early date, suggest that the name as a whole may have been imported from France, and that Robin Hood is merely a translation of Robin des Bois;² "hood" and "wood" are interchangeable in several English dialects.

Now what was this May-day festival, at which Robin Hood played such a prominent part? There can be no doubt that it was of pagan origin—that it was, in fact, the spring festival which was theoretically superseded by the Christian Easter. We should expect a pagan festival to be associated with a pagan deity, and we should not be disappointed. We have in Robin Hood a deity particularly associated with spring and vegetation. He was the King of May, and Maid Marian was the Queen of May. As such she wore a golden crown,³ and it seems that it was the custom in every town and village of England for a young man and a girl or pretty boy to be dressed in royal costume in order that they might play the parts of Robin Hood and Maid Marian, otherwise the King and Queen of May, in the May-day festivities.

All classes took part in these festivities, and the belief that Robin Hood was particularly the hero of the poor is quite unfounded. In 1473 Sir John Paston complains that the man whom he has kept to play St. George and Robin Hood has left him,⁴ and the household book of the Earl of Northumberland, *circa* 1520, makes provision for "liveries for Robin Hood."⁵ It is recorded that in the reign of Henry VI the aldermen and sheriffs of London dined on May-day in a wood at Stepney, and in 1515 King Henry VIII spent May-day with his Court in a wood near Greenwich, the

¹ E. K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, vol. i, p. 172.

² Not, as Miss Murray suggests, Robin with a hood, M. A. Murray, *The God of the Witches*, p. 36.

³ W. C. Hazlitt, *Faiths and Folklore*, vol. ii, p. 383.

⁴ J. Gairdner, *Paston Letters*, vol. iii, p. 89.

⁵ E. K. Chambers, *Medieval Stage*, vol. i, p. 177.

courtiers all dressed in green and carrying bows. That in so doing he was following an established custom seems clear from Malory, who tells us that in the month of May, Queen Guinevere warned the Knights of the Round Table to be ready early in the morning, well horsed and clad in green, to accompany her on maying into the woods and fields beside Westminster.¹ On these occasions there was probably a masque at the conclusion of which the player who had taken the part of Robin Hood, King of May, made a graceful apology to the King for having usurped his title, and received a gracious pardon. Wynkyn de Worde's *Mery Geste*, in which "King Edward" appears, may well have been performed for King Edward IV. When the festivities were no longer held, references to some such little ceremony were taken to mean that a real Robin Hood had once been really pardoned by a king. This, in my view, is how myths often arise.

The May-day ceremonies of medieval England must have been very different from their prehistoric prototypes, but we can perhaps gain some idea of the latter from an analysis of the stories. They fall into three classes—stories of single combat, stories of feats with the bow, and tricky stories. To take the first class, Robin Hood fights single combats with Little John, Will Scarlet, Friar Tuck, Arthur-a-Bland, the beggar, and the potter. In all these combats he is worsted, and in several is knocked out. They all seem to be variants of a type story which goes as follows: Robin Hood is alone in the forest, and meets a stranger; after a great deal of boasting, challenging, and, in the older versions, coarse abuse, they fight, and Robin is knocked out. Recovering himself, he sounds his horn, and his men, who are close at hand though unseen, rush on to the scene. The stranger is then acclaimed a member of the band. In some versions Robin hands his lady over to the victor, who receives her with coarse delight.² It is interesting to compare with this

¹ *Morte Darthur*, xix, 1.

² Malone Soc. Collections, vol. ii, p. 132.

the story told in the *Mabinogi* of Kulhwch and Olwen, of how two warriors quarrelled over Creidylad or Cordelia, daughter of Lud of the Silver Hand. The judgment of Arthur was "that the two suitors fight every First of May for ever "henceforth till the Day of "Doom; and he who then proves victorious—let him "take the damsel."¹

All these stories are suggestive of an ancient system by which the king reigned from one May-day till the next, when he had to fight for his title, if not for his life, and in which the queen became the wife of the successful combatant. There is a great deal of evidence for the existence of such systems in many parts of the world, and I shall discuss some of it in Chapter XVI.

The only combat in which Robin Hood is victorious is that with Guy of Gisborne, who is disguised as a horse, and Robin, having killed and mutilated him, assumes his horse disguise. This seems to go back to a somewhat different type of tradition, that of men in animal form, with which I shall deal in Chapter XXIV.

The second class of Robin Hood stories, the stories of feats with the bow, may be due partly to the fact that by the fifteenth century the long-bow had become the traditional weapon of Englishmen, and partly to borrowings from the cognate myth of William Tell. It is interesting to note that whereas a century ago all scholars believed as firmly in the historicity of William Tell as most of them now do in that of Achilles or King Arthur, Tell is now recognized as a purely mythical figure, a member of a widespread group.² Robin Hood is as clearly related to William Tell as is the Sheriff of Nottingham to Gessler.

As regards the tricky stories, they may be due to a confusion between Robin Hood and Robin Goodfellow. Perhaps the two were never very clearly distinguished.

It is probable, as we have seen, that Robin Hood is Robin of the Wood. Now according to Skeat the

¹ Quoted by J. Rhys, *The Arthurian Legend*, p. 319.

² S. Baring-Gould, *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages*, ch. v.

original meaning of "wood" was "twig," and hence a mass of twigs or "bush"; if this is so, then Robin Hood is Robin of the Twigs, or the Bush, which suggests connections with another well-known figure of the spring festivities, Jack-in-the-Green, and with the carved faces, with twigs protruding from their mouths, which are a feature of so many of our old churches. Robin's relations with the Church are obscure. His festivities, like many pagan survivals, seem to have been tolerated, and in 1499 the churchwardens of Reading received xixs. on account of the "gaderyng "of Robyn-hod," while as late as 1566 the churchwardens of Abingdon paid eighteen pence for setting up Robin Hood's bower.¹ Yet he was, as we have seen, the professed enemy of all clergy. It may be that the incidents in which ecclesiastics cut such a poor figure were aimed at individuals who tried to suppress the festivities, or it may be that in the sixteenth century bishops and abbots were fair game. Anyhow, there can be little doubt that these incidents, like all the features of the Robin Hood stories which are not purely mythical, represent the customs and ideas of the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century rather than those of any period at which Robin Hood can be supposed to have lived.

We may then summarize the results obtained in this chapter as follows:—

(1) There is no evidence for Robin Hood as a historical character, or for any attempt to set him up as such within at least three centuries of his alleged lifetime.

(2) There is abundant evidence, in many parts of England and Scotland, for Robin Hood as the name given to the principal actor in the May-day dramatic performances and revels.

(3) The attempt to make Robin Hood a historical character not merely involves us in endless anachronisms and other absurdities, but renders

¹ W. C. Hazlitt, op. cit., p. 529.

the known facts of his cult completely inexplicable.

(4) The alleged incidents of his career are analogous to those of many other heroes of tradition, especially William Tell, who is admittedly mythical.

We may conclude with a quotation from Dr. Johnson, who, having commented on the readiness with which the poems attributed to Ossian were accepted in Scotland as genuine, admitted that the same kind of ready belief might be found in his own country. "He would undertake," he said, "to write "an epic poem on the story of Robin Hood, and half "England, to whom the names and places he should "mention in it are familiar, would believe and declare "they had heard it from their earliest years."¹

¹ J. Boswell, *The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson*, p. 324.

CHAPTER V

THE NORSE SAGAS

THE task of proving a negative is always a hard one. To prove Robin Hood unhistoric is rendered comparatively easy by the fact that we can meet him in print when he is still a character in the popular drama and has as yet made no serious claim to historicity. I shall try to show that the heroes of the sagas were originally dramatic characters, but this task is far more difficult because the saga heroes were recruited, not from contemporary drama, but from the traditions of a drama which had long been extinct.

The Icelandic or other Norse narratives derived from traditional sources may be divided into three classes. The first consists of tales of the gods; the second of tales of Sigurd the Volsung and other heroes who are supposed to have lived in the period A.D. 350–550; and the third of the Icelandic and other sagas, which deal with heroes who are supposed to have lived in the period A.D. 850–1050.

It is now generally recognized that the tales of the gods are purely mythological, but there are still a few incorrigible Euhemerists who believe that Odin, Woden, or Wotan, the northern Zeus, was a real man, a hero who led the original Swedes to Sweden, or the original somebodies to somewhere. A reference to the *Edda* should suffice to dispel this illusion. We are told¹ that Odin was the son of Fridleif and a descendant of Thor, and later² that he was the son of Borr and the father of Thor. In both versions Odin's wife is Frigg, but Thor is not the son of Frigg but of Earth, who is Odin's daughter and wife, though in the next paragraph Earth is the daughter of Annar.

Baldur, again, lives in Heaven, and is the wisest of

¹ A. G. Brodeur, *Prose Edda*, p. 7.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 22.

the gods, but he was killed and burnt, and now resides with the dead. He is young and fair, but has a grown-up son.¹

Such discrepancies, of course, never occur in connection with historical personages, and the fact that the compilers of the *Edda* made no attempt to reconcile them shows that they did not regard Odin and Baldur as historical personages, even if they had any idea of history at all, which is improbable.

Nevertheless, Mr. Hodgkin, following previous writers, tells us that "the Scandinavian traditions tell of "a war between the Njorth-Frey family ('the Vanir') "and the family of Odin ('the Anses'). Here we have "a true reminiscence of rivalry between competing "cults."² This is equivalent to maintaining that *Paradise Lost* embodies a true reminiscence of a conflict between Christians and pagans.

We will now pass to the second group of tales, of which Sigurd is the central figure, and consider what Professor Chadwick has to say about them. He tells us that "apart from the last cycles embracing Harald "Hilditonn and Ragnar Lodbrok, which are entirely "confined to Northern literature, all the historical "personages whom we have been able to identify "belong to a period extending over barely two cen- "turies. . . . In the stories which form the common "theme of English, German, and Scandinavian poets "we find no mention of historical persons who lived "after the middle of the sixth century. . . . This "period coincides with the Age of National Migra- "tions, the conquest of Roman provinces, and the "conversion of most of the Continental peoples to "Christianity. Yet Danish characters figure more "prominently than those of any other nation in the "stories, though the Danes took no part, collectively "at least, in the movements against the Roman "Empire, and were not converted to Christianity till "much later. Some of the chief characters, such as

¹ *Prose Edda*, pp. 36, 41, 74.

² R. H. Hodgkin, *History of the Anglo-Saxons*, vol. i, p. 28.

"Attila, were heathens, and some, such as Theodric, "Christians, yet the change of faith plays no part in the "stories."¹ Nor does the Roman Empire play any part in the stories, in which all the characters are represented as sharing a common religion, language, and culture. Attila and Theodric were, of course, historical personages, but they are never represented in the stories as doing anything which they can be supposed to have done in real life. Their names were probably put in as suitable names for important characters at a time when they were vaguely famous, perhaps fifty years after their deaths. According to Sir John Rhys, Attila takes the place of the king of the dead, and Theodric or Dietrich is really a sun-hero.²

The case of Jormunrek or Ermanaric is different, since he is said by Ammian not merely to have lived, but to have done some of the things which the stories say that he did. A good deal of capital has been made of this, but when we examine Ammian's narrative³ we see that he does not speak of these incidents as happenings in his own time or vicinity, but at some uncertain time in the past, and in a region of which we are merely told that it was beyond the Dniester. While we may give Ammian full credit for reporting faithfully all that he saw and heard, we cannot suppose him capable of distinguishing the history of Eastern Europe from its mythology, or his barbarian informants of being more capable than other illiterates of transmitting historical facts. The fact that Swanhild, Ermanaric's luckless queen, is a Rosomonian according to Jordanes, a Lombard in *Widsith*, a Hellespontine in Saxo, and a Volsung in the *Volsunga Saga*,⁴ makes it pretty clear that she, at any rate, was not a historical personage.

The great central figure in this group of stories, however, is Sigurd or Siegfried the dragon-slayer, and if we can dispose of his claims to historicity, we may perhaps

¹ H. M. Chadwick, *The Heroic Age*, pp. 25-9.

² J. Rhys, *The Arthurian Legend*, p. 266.

³ *Ammianus Marcellinus*, ch. xxxi, p. 3.

⁴ R. W. Chambers, *Widsith*, p. 23.

disregard his fellows. As Sigurd he is the hero of the *Volsunga Saga*, the great Icelandic saga upon which all later sagas are modelled, and from which, as we shall see, they draw many of their incidents. It was composed, probably in the twelfth century, out of elements drawn from a large number of traditional poems and ballads. As Siegfried he is the hero of the Lay of the Nibelungs, which was composed in Germany about the same time. The two are versions of the same story, of which the main features are as follows: Sigmund (Siegmund) obtains from Odin (Wotan) a magic sword, with which he performs various feats. After his death in battle, the pieces of the sword, which had been shattered, are kept for his son Sigurd (Siegfried) and made by a cunning smith into a sword as good as before. With this sword he slays the dragon Fafnir (Fafner) which guards the hoard of gold. On cooking the dragon's heart, and accidentally tasting it, he finds that he can understand the song of the birds, which warn him against the treachery of the smith.

The slaying of the dragon, and the roasting of its heart, seem to have been regarded in the North as the most important incidents in the story, to judge by the frequency with which they are represented on monuments.¹

Having slain the smith and loaded the treasure on to his horse, the hero proceeds on his way, and comes to a hill-top upon which he finds Brynhild (Brunhilde) asleep within a ring of fire. They fall in love, but by spells and shape-changings are tricked into marrying others. Eventually Brynhild's jealousy causes his death, which is avenged upon his slayers. One of them, Gunnar (Gunther), is thrown bound into a snake-pit, but charms the snakes by playing upon a harp with his toes. This incident also is often represented on monuments.

The usual method of dealing with such stories may

¹ B. S. Phillpotts, *The Elder Edda, etc.*, p. 49; P. M. C. Kermode, *Manx Crosses*, pp. 172-4.

be expressed in the words of Mr. Gray, who tells us¹ that "the saga constitutes the earliest type of history, "and it is possible, in great part, to reconstruct a large "portion of real history by the excision of material "obviously fictitious." We are apparently to suppose that the story-tellers could, and often did, lie when they spoke of giants and dragons, but that they were incapable of diverging a hair's breadth from the truth when dealing with purely human activities. How much of the narrative which I have just sketched would be regarded as history by Mr. Gray is uncertain. It would no doubt depend on whether he regarded harp-playing with the toes as "obviously fictitious." In any case, the criterion is purely subjective, and therefore quite valueless. Professor H. J. Rose is driven to admitting that "we have not yet an agreed and perfected technique" for extracting history from saga;² obviously not, since the only way of attempting to extract history from any narrative is to check it with facts known from other sources, and tested in this way, the sagas break down completely.

It is impossible to give Sigurd a date or a place. On one view the wide distribution of his story in Teutonic lands shows that he was a great hero of the still-undivided Teutonic race; another view, as we have seen, would put him somewhere about A.D. 450, that is to say, a thousand years later. But even if we were to accept the latter date, we should find it difficult to explain how his daughter Aslaug came to marry Ragnar Lodbrog, the traditional leader of the Viking army which looted Paris in A.D. 845. And no amount of rationalization will explain how he came to perform the same feats, and meet the same fate, on the shores of the Baltic and the banks of the Rhine.

But there are still further difficulties. In the Saxon poem of *Beowulf*, which is believed to have been composed in the first half of the eighth century, and therefore gives us much the oldest extant version of the

¹ L. H. Gray, in *Hastings' Encyclopaedia*, vol. vi, p. 1.

² *Folk-Lore*, vol. xlvi, p. 22.

story, we find that Sigurd is not mentioned at all, but that the feats later attributed to him are attributed to Sigmund, who gains immortal fame by slaying the dragon and carrying off the hoard.¹ The conclusion to which we are driven is that the *Volsunga Saga*, far from being "the earliest type of history," is nothing but a novel based on myth.

The *Volsunga Saga* was the first of a long series of sagas, most of which were composed in the thirteenth century. They were almost unknown in this country till about seventy years ago, when many of them were translated into English, and aroused by their literary qualities unstinted admiration. It was not only their literary qualities, however, which popularized them, but the belief that they contained genuine historical records of people who were either actually our ancestors or closely akin to them. A more critical study has shown, however, that like the *Volsunga Saga*, which they closely follow, they are really novels, and what is more, novels written in a highly artificial and sophisticated literary style, so artificial that it would be difficult to adapt a true story to the saga form, even if the attempt were made. The sagas are great literature, and the belief that simple stories of fact, related by simple people, could be great literature, can be held only by those who have never heard such stories related by simple people, and who have never studied the development of literature. Great literature is always the end-product of a long process of experiment and evolution.

Koht gives us an idea of the manner in which this evolution occurred. He tells us that the first known saga, one about St. Olaf, of which only fragments are preserved, was written about 1160. It seems to have consisted largely of accounts of miracles. "The pioneer "of secular saga-writing was a man named Eirek "Oddson," who wrote, about 1170, an account of the civil wars in Norway which had taken place in his own lifetime. The subject, and in part the author, of the first royal saga was King Sverri, and the saga was

¹ T. Arnold, *Beowulf*, pp. xix, 220.

written, about 1185, as a piece of propaganda. "The 'bishops' sagas . . . are devotional just as much as 'historical literature, and so, like King Sverri's saga, 'they belong to the field of propaganda.'"¹ Koht also tells us that "the writing of the family sagas does not 'constitute the beginning of saga-writing, but is a later 'product of it'; that "the pure Icelandic sagas still 'maintained the character of art and entertainment so 'strongly stamped upon them that they could not 'easily come to be considered as historical works 'before real historical sagas had come into existence"; and that the *Njalssaga* was one of the last to be written, about the end of the thirteenth century.² The English editor of this saga, Sir George Dasent, supposed it to have been written down about 1100.³

Olrik tells us⁴ that "Iceland has its saga age, the age "in which 'the sagas were made' as the saga language "itself states, i.e., when the events described took place. "This is the period from 930, the end of the settlement "age, to 1030, the conclusion of the first generation "after the introduction of Christianity." But it is impossible to believe that noteworthy events were limited to this period. The sagas were made, of course, when they were written down, and we have here one of many examples of the fact that traditional incidents are usually supposed to have happened about one hundred and fifty to two hundred years before they were first recorded in writing.

The so-called "family saga" really revolves round the life of a single hero, and follows a set form. The prologue gives the hero's pedigree, and tells in brief some of the principal feats of his ancestors. In the first act we have the birth and upbringing of the hero and his youthful exploits; we have also an account of the rise and progress of the family feud through which the hero will meet his death.

¹ H. Koht, *The Old Norse Sagas*, pp. 49, 52, 61.

² H. Koht, op. cit., pp. 48, 169.

³ G. W. Dasent, *The Story of Burnt Njal*, p. xii.

⁴ A. Olrik, *Viking Civilization*, p. 179.

The second act is an interlude, in which the hero leaves his home in Iceland (Orkney, Faroe), and goes to Norway, where he defeats and kills famous vikings, berserks, and giants, and becomes one of the leading men at the court of Olaf Tryggvason or Earl Hakon. A comparative study of these interludes has led Miss Danielli to conclude that they are descriptions of an initiation ceremonial.¹

In the third act the hero is at home again, and though guiltless, is involved in feuds with powerful and unscrupulous neighbours. The toils gradually close about him, and eventually he is killed fighting bravely against enormous odds. An epilogue tells how his death is avenged.

It is impossible to believe that such a series of incidents formed the normal life-history of a Norseman, even of a Norse hero, so that when Koht says that "the family saga manifests a definite tendency to "depart from history and approach the pure novel,"² he is hardly stating the case correctly, since he implies that these sagas were originally historical. The common form in their framework seems to show quite clearly that this was not so. Even the so-called "historical sagas" are not really historical, since "scholars have been forced to discover in the historical "sagas an increasing quantity of mistakes and mis-information."³ The phrase "scholars have been "forced" is significant as indicating the general reluctance of scholars to face the facts. Koht shows that the mistakes go much farther than the misrepresentation of incidents. Thus we learn that true history knows nothing of the duel as a legal remedy, though it plays a large part in the sagas; that Snorri's conception of the struggle between king and nobility, in which the plots of many of the sagas begin, is essentially false; and that, though the sagas profess to deal chiefly with heathen times, "it is remarkable how

¹ *Folk-Lore*, vol. lvi, pp. 229 ff.

² H. Koht, op. cit., p. 87.

³ Op. cit., p. 119.

"little they contain of really heathen thinking and "practice."¹

In spite of all this, however, Koht holds that the sagas contain many historical facts, and instances the discovery of America by Leif. I shall discuss this story later, but will note here that, like all the other sagas, it contains many supernatural incidents. Sir George Dasent, who translated many of the sagas, and believed implicitly in their historicity, regarded these supernatural incidents as proofs of this, since they were in accordance with the beliefs of the age.² The age, with the beliefs of which they accorded, may well have been the thirteenth century. In any case the question is one not of local colour, but of actual fact, and it is difficult to see how the introduction of supernatural beings could make a story more credible than it would otherwise have been. The appearance of the ghost in *Hamlet* does not convince us of the play's historicity.

An analysis of the sagas shows not merely that their framework is common form, but that their basis is mythological. The saga of Grettir the Strong is supposed to be the true story of a man who died about the year 1030, and was composed about two hundred years later. When we examine it, we find that it has striking resemblance to the saga of Beowulf, which is supposed to be the more or less true story of a man who lived in Denmark about the sixth century, and which was composed in England about two hundred years later. Grettir, we are told, was "the strongest "man in the land of his age, and the best able to deal "with spectres and goblins."³ His chief feats, like those of Beowulf, were victories over supernatural beings, and these are described in very similar language. Grettir's struggle with Glam's ghost is closely parallel to Beowulf's struggle with Grendel, and his fights with the troll-woman and the giant under the waterfall to Beowulf's fight with Grendel's mother. It

¹ Op. cit., pp. 69, 117, 138.

² Op. cit., p. xii.

³ G. A. Hight, *The Saga of Grettir the Strong*, p. 238.

is to be noted that the saga of Beowulf was preserved by the merest accident, and that but for its existence Grettir would have a much more plausible claim to historicity.

The chief apparent difference is that the saga of Grettir is in prose, and that of Beowulf in verse, but this difference is less important than it seems at first glance. Though most of *Grettissaga* is in prose, we find that on important occasions the hero always bursts into verse. There are some sixty stanzas in the saga, of which about two-thirds are spoken by Grettir himself, often on occasions, such as the middle of a fight, when they come very oddly in a prose narrative. There can, I think, be little doubt that the saga was originally a mythological poem parallel to that of Beowulf, and that it was reduced to prose by a novelist who was unable to break away altogether from the traditional form.

We are told that in the Irish traditional tales "not infrequently the fragments of verse introduced into a prose tale are quotations from an older poetical version of the same tale; and hence it often happens that while the prose may be plain enough, the poetry is archaic and obscure."¹ Exactly the same applies to the sagas. The verses which we find in them are full of circumlocutions and obscure metaphors. The boastful and prolix Grettir of the verses is quite a different person from the laconic Grettir of the prose. Even a wet cloak, when it suddenly breaks out into verse,² cannot speak straightforwardly. In the *Njals-saga* the novelist has sometimes allowed the verse to remain next to his prose paraphrase,³ and anyone who compares them can see clearly that the simplicity and directness, which has caused the "naturalness" of the sagas to be so highly praised, forms no part of the traditional narrative.

In the *Njalssaga*, the culminating incident is the

¹ P. W. Joyce, *Old Celtic Romances*, p. v.

² R. Proctor, *The Story of the Laxdalers*, p. 209.

³ E.g., pp. 42, 75, 115.

burning of Njal and his sons in their house, and the account of this incident and of the events which lead up to it bear a striking resemblance to the death of the sons of Usnach, as related in the Irish mythological tale. For example, when Skarphedinn and his brothers are shut up in the burning house, Gunnar, a man whose relatives Skarphedinn has slain, climbs up and looks over the wall. Skarphedinn throws a tooth at him, hitting him in the eye, and causing his eyeball to fall out on to his cheek. Naisi and his brothers are shut up in a house, and before Conchobar orders his men to set fire to it, he sends Tredorn, a man whose relatives Naisi has slain, "to see whether her own "shape and form remain on Deirdre." He peeps through a small window which had been left open, and Naisi throws a draughtsman at him, hitting him in the eye, and causing his eyeball to fall out on to his cheek.¹

Parallels with Irish myth are not confined to the *Njalssaga*. In the *Volsunga Saga*, Sigurd roasts the dragon's heart for Regin, who warns him not to eat it himself; happening to touch it, he burns his thumb and, putting it into his mouth to cool it, immediately understands the song of the birds. In an Irish myth Finn Eges roasts the heart of the Salmon of Linn Feic for Finn mac Cumhail, who warns him not to eat it himself; happening to touch it, he burns his thumb and, putting it into his mouth to cool it, immediately becomes possessed of all knowledge.²

The description of Egil's grief in *Egilssaga* is "surely "but an echo of Cuchullin's rage in the Irish heroic "poetry."³ It may be noted that *Egilssaga* is one of the most convincingly written, yet one series of incidents is described by Olrik⁴ as "quite unhistorical," and another by Koht⁵ as "pure invention."

¹ G. W. Dasent, op. cit., p. 241; E. Hull, *The Cuchullin Saga*, p. 39.

² Magnusson and Morris, *The Volsunga Saga*, p. 64; J. Weston, *From Ritual to Romance*, p. 125.

³ A. Olrik, op. cit., p. 188.

⁴ Op. cit., p. 186.

⁵ *See note 72*

Of the *Laxdaela Saga*, Koht says that "it has even a kind of historical setting, though it may be said that 'the chronology is confused, and other pretended facts 'are rather untrustworthy.'"¹ Olrik derives one of its leading incidents from the *Volsunga Saga*,² while Professor Ker describes it as a modern prose version of the "Niblung tragedy."³

From the *Volsunga Saga* come also, according to Keary, who describes them as "utterly fabulous," the stories of Ragnar Lodbrok, including his death in the snake-pit;⁴ and from the same saga, according to Koht,⁵ comes the story told in Olaf Tryggvason's *Saga of Olaf and Queen Sigrid*.

Nor is it only from the *Volsunga Saga* and Irish myth that the incidents of the later sagas are derived. "The death of Skarphedinn," says Professor Ker,⁶ "is like a prose rendering of the death of Roland," and the epilogue to the *Grettissaga* is derived from French romance.⁷

Sir Charles Oman, discussing the well-known story of the Battle of Stamford Bridge in the saga of Harald Haardraade,⁸ shows that "the whole story is one 'tissue of mistakes'; it appears to be based on an account of the Battle of Hastings. The saga is composed largely of incidents and anecdotes derived from earlier sources, and is, in fact, a historical novel by one who has been at small pains to work up his subject.

It is possible that extracts from contemporary records may have been inserted in some of the royal sagas, and that these are therefore to that extent historical, but this possibility will but slightly affect

¹ Op. cit., p. 91.

² Op. cit., p. 188.

³ W. P. Ker, *Epic and Romance*, p. 219.

⁴ C. F. Keary, *The Vikings in Western Christendom*, pp. 257, 326.

⁵ Op. cit., p. 155.

⁶ Op. cit., p. 265.

⁷ G. A. Hight, op. cit., p. x.

⁸ C. W. Oman, *England Before the Norman Conquest*, p. 640 n.

our conclusions about the sagas as a whole, which are:—

- (1) That their framework is common form.
- (2) That their principal incidents are mythological.
- (3) That their superficial appearance of realism is a literary artifice.
- (4) That the picture of pagan times which they present is a false one.
- (5) That when they can be checked with known facts they prove to be quite unhistorical.

I shall later adduce evidence to suggest that the origin, not of the sagas themselves, but of the poems on which they are based, is the ritual drama.

EXCURSUS ON LEIF THE LUCKY

So much importance has been attached to the alleged discovery of Greenland by Eirek the Red, and that of America by his son Leif, that some discussion of them seems called for. Mr. Gathorne-Hardy, in his book, *The Norse Discoverers of America*, collects all the references to the subject in the sagas, and concludes that they are in the main statements of fact. I shall give as briefly as possible my reasons for believing the contrary.

For the Norse discovery of America there is no evidence outside the sagas, whereas there is proof, from historical and archæological sources, that the Norse did, in fact, discover and settle Greenland. This fact, however, no more proves the historicity of Eirek than does the fact that the Saxons conquered England prove the historicity of Hengist and Horsa, or the fact that there are people in the world prove that it was first settled by Adam and Eve. All the evidence for Eirek is purely traditional, which means, as I have tried to show, that it is no evidence at all.

The stories of Eirek, and of Leif, in their original form, seem to be derived solely from one Ari, called the

Wise or the Learned, who appears to have been born about 1067, and to have written, about 1130, a history of the Icelanders, of which we have not the original, but a summary written at a later date by an unknown hand.¹ In this we are told that Ari had received his information about Eirek the Red, and also apparently about Leif, from his uncle Thorkel, who had received it from one of Eirek's men. The events described fall, according to Gathorne-Hardy, "within a period "bridged by one human memory from the time of "occurrence to the time when they could be recorded "in writing," but when we realize that the interval was one of about a hundred and forty years, we see that this is a misstatement. Eirek's man must have kept the facts in his mind for about fifty years before he passed them on to Thorkel, who again must have kept them in his mind for about fifty years before he passed them on to Ari, who did not write them down till about forty years later. Even then, if we have Ari's own words, which is doubtful, his evidence is merely third-hand evidence, and very bad third-hand evidence at that.

The only other alleged reference to the discovery of America in any early document is in a description of the North written by Adam of Bremen about 1070. He says that King Svein, of Denmark, told him of an island in the ocean, which many had discovered, and which abounded in vines and corn, both growing wild.² Such stories, which I shall return to presently, are a commonplace of myth, but anyhow we have here no mention of Leif. The five extant versions of Leif's story are all, so we are apparently invited to believe, derived from Ari, or rather from Ari's uncle's anonymous informant.

According to three of these versions, Leif goes from Greenland to Norway, where he is converted to Christianity, and finds favour with King Olaf Tryggvason. The latter urges him to convert Greenland to

¹ Koht, op. cit., p. 130; Gathorne-Hardy, op. cit., p. 98.

² Gathorne-Hardy, op. cit., p. 98.

Christianity, and sends him back there accompanied by a priest and some holy men. On the way Leif finds Wine-land the Good (no details given), and rescues a shipwrecked crew; and when he reaches Greenland succeeds in converting the inhabitants to Christianity. He is afterwards called Leif the Lucky, whether because he converted the Greenlanders or rescued the shipwrecked crew is not clear; anyhow it is not because he discovered Wine-land. A fourth account is similar to the three previously mentioned, but does not mention Wine-land at all.¹

The fifth version of the story of Leif, which contains the detailed account of his discovery of Wine-land, is in the *Flatey Book*. It makes him start off on a voyage of discovery after his return to Greenland, and implies distinctly that he had not made any discoveries before.² The other detailed account of alleged American exploration is in the story of Thorfinn Karlsefni; of this there are two versions, both late, and one obviously copied from the other.³

The first four versions of the story of Leif are also obviously copied one from another, and it seems certain that whichever of these is the earliest contains the earliest version of the story. It seems impossible that they can be abridgements of the longer version, since they all differ from it in the same material points.

Now if a man called Leif really discovered America, it seems to me quite absurd to suppose that three chroniclers could mention the fact without giving any particulars whatever, and that a fourth could mention Leif without mentioning his discovery at all. The only historical character mentioned in the story is Olaf Tryggvason, and as I have already suggested, association with him impels a suspicion of fiction. Apart from that, the story is strongly suggestive of a religious tract. The seeker after righteousness takes with him a priest as a companion and guide on his voyage through life, and is thereby enabled to steer clear of

¹ Gathorne Hardy, op. cit., pp. 74-6.

² Ibid., p. 41.

³ Ibid., pp. 52 seq.

Sin (the fleshpots of the heathen) and Death (shipwreck), and to reach that Green Land where the Lucky (that is the saved) enjoy eternal bliss. I suggest that some such tract, imported probably from Ireland, was, with other material of diverse but equally un-historical origin, embodied by Ari, or someone else, in a quasi-historical narrative.

I further suggest that a little later, when saga-novels were all the rage, some novelist made the story of Leif the basis of a novel, to which that of Thorfinn formed a popular sequel, and that this novel found its way into the *Flatey Book* in much the same way as the romances of Geoffrey of Monmouth found their way into the history of England.

The novelist did not, of course, draw his materials from his inner consciousness, and his sources were, in the main, the Otherworld voyages of Irish mythology, those of Bran, of Maelduin, and of Tadg.¹ The resemblances to the voyage of Tadg² are particularly striking. In both stories there are salmon and whales, and the vines of Leif correspond with the large purple berries of Tadg. Tadg meets a large and fierce ram, while Thorfinn has a bull which goes wild and gives trouble. Tadg and his men find a plain with "a dew 'of honey over it,'" while Leif and his men "found dew 'on the grass, and put it into their mouths, and it seemed to them that they had never tasted anything 'so sweet as this dew.'"

Tadg's encounter with the woman of the Otherworld and with Connla the son of Conn, are paralleled by the visit of the Otherworld woman to Thorfinn's wife, and by the conversation between the living and the dead Thorsteins. Tadg has a man of the Otherworld who goes with him as guide, and he corresponds with Leif's foster-father, who recognizes the berries as grapes, and gets drunk on them. But the sagamen could never keep away from the *Volsunga Saga* for

¹ The suggestion that Wine-land was the Otherworld has been made by Dr. Nansen; Gathorne-Hardy, op. cit., p. 154.

² Lady Gregory, *Gods and Fighting Men*, pp. 126 seq.

long, and in the characteristics of this foster-father, who was small, skilled in crafts, and spoke a strange tongue, we may recognize Regin, the foster-father of Sigurd, who was small, and a skilled craftsman, with a knowledge of many tongues.

The sagaman may have drawn upon the classics for the curious uniped which figures in one of his stories, but Ireland was his main source of inspiration. It is several times mentioned, and some of Thorfinn's men, meeting with a storm off "Keelness" in Wine-land, are cast ashore in Ireland.

The stories contain many more improbabilities and supernatural events, but I will only add that, as in the Irish Otherworld, there is no frost in Wine-land. This fact has been carefully overlooked by those who would find Wine-land in America.

CHAPTER VI

KING ARTHUR

IT should be an easier task to prove the mythical character of King Arthur, since the literature which has grown up round his name is admittedly a literature of pure fiction. Nobody mistakes Chrestien de Troyes, Malory, or nowadays even Geoffrey of Monmouth, for historians, and Arthur should therefore be in a different category from the heroes created, or rather adapted from myth, by the anonymous genius who composed the prose version of the *Volsunga Saga*, and his successors and imitators.

That he is not so is due to two causes. The first is the extreme lengths to which Euhemerism has been carried by modern scholars. Whereas Euhemeros was content to claim that the gods had once been great men, it now seems to be generally held that such a thing as a purely mythical character has never existed. The second cause is that Arthur is supposed to have lived among the post-Roman Britons, a people of whom we know almost nothing, and about whom, therefore, those who attach little weight to evidence can speculate with considerable freedom.

The evidence for Arthur's historical existence is almost nil. The only extant writer of the time when he is, according to the more fashionable theories, supposed to have lived, is Gildas, a monk of British origin, who probably composed in Brittany, between 550 and 570, his *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* (*The Destruction and Conquest of Britain*). Gildas makes little claim to historicity: "If there were any records "of my country," he says, "they were burned in the "fires of the conquest, or carried away on the ships of "the exiles, so that I can only follow the dark and frag- "mentary tale that was told me beyond the sea." He deals in a highly dramatic and rhetorical manner with

the defeat of the Britons, but tells us that "a remnant . . . take up arms and challenge their victors to battle under Ambrosius Aurelian. . . . To these men, by the Lord's favour, there came victory. . . . From that time, the citizens were sometimes victorious, sometimes the enemy. . . . This continued up to the year of the siege of Badon Hill, and of almost the last great slaughter inflicted upon the rascally crew."¹

"Gildas," says his editor, "would never have regarded himself as a 'historian'; he is a preacher, a revivalist, who will 'attempt to state a few facts' by way of illustrating his message that divine anger must visit with punishment a sinning people and priesthood."² His material seems to have been derived chiefly from the prophet Isaiah,³ and from classical sources,⁴ so that although he places the siege of Badon Hill in the year of his own birth, we cannot be sure that it ever took place at all. Anyhow, he knows nothing of Arthur. "We must admit that there is no echo of 'Arthur in Gildas,'" says Chambers,⁵ and describes this fact as odd, but it is odd only on the assumption, which, as I shall show, is unwarrantable, that Arthur was a real man, Gildas' contemporary.

There is no mention of Arthur in Beda or in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, but this is unimportant, since these writings are quite unhistorical for the period before about A.D. 600. We pass on to Nennius, in whose *Historia Britonum* the first mention of Arthur occurs. Who Nennius was is uncertain, but he is believed to have lived, somewhere on the borders of England and Wales, about the end of the eighth or beginning of the ninth centuries. His sole written authorities, apart from certain of the classics, seem to have been Gildas, a fabulous life of St. Germanus, and

¹ H. Williams, *Gildas*, pp. 61-3.

² *Ibid.*, p. vii.

³ C. Elton, *Origins of English History*, p. 364.

⁴ C. B. Lewis, *Classical Mythology and Arthurian Romance*, p. 248.

⁵ E. K. Chambers, *Arthur of Britain*, p. 181.

perhaps Beda. His "history" consists so largely of miracles, anachronisms, and other absurdities that it is obviously unworthy to be regarded as an authority for any fact whatever. "To-day, at any rate," says Dr. Wheeler, discussing the story of Vortigern, "the absolute, basic value of Nennius to the historian of 'the fifth century is precisely nothing."¹ What applies to the fifth century applies equally to the sixth. Yet this farrago of myths and absurdities, written some three hundred years after the alleged event, is the sole evidence for Arthur's historicity.

Nennius credits Arthur with twelve glorious victories, of which the last was at Mount Badon, "where-in fell 960 men in one day at a single onset of Arthur; "and no one overthrew them but he alone, and in all "the battles he came out victorious." He does not speak of Arthur as king, but as "war-leader" (*dux bellorum*) to the kings of Britain.

And where was Mount Badon? The old writers all identified it with Bath, but the moderns, who accept "tradition" when it suits them, but have no hesitation in throwing it over when it does not, have rejected Bath, though they are not agreed upon a substitute. One school places it at Badbury, in Dorset, and places the other eleven battles in various parts of south-western England. Another school equates Badon with Bouden, in Linlithgowshire, and finds sites for the other battles near the borders of England and Scotland.² Mr. Crawford makes a valiant attempt to reconcile the two schools by supposing that Arthur was a petty chieftain, "probably in South Wales," who nevertheless fought his battles in Scotland.³ Another school finds the sites of Arthur's battles in North Wales; in fact, anyone who can find a hill with a name beginning with "B-d" has as much right as anyone else to claim it as the site of a battle about which nothing is known.

¹ R. E. M. Wheeler, *London and the Saxons*, p. 34.

² Elton, op. cit., p. 367; Chambers, *Arthur of Britain*, p. 199.

³ O. G. S. Crawford, in *Antiquity*, 1935, p. 290.

After Nennius, our next so-called authority is the Welsh Annals, which are believed to date from the tenth century. They make no mention of Ambrosius, and transfer to Mount Badon, in a still more miraculous form, Nennius' account of Arthur's miraculous feats at the battle of Guinnion, the eighth on his list.

Lastly, we come to Geoffrey of Monmouth (c. 1100–54), whose *History of the Kings of Britain* is the real foundation of the belief in Arthur's historicity. The old belief was that Geoffrey was a Welsh monk, who derived his facts from documents or traditions still extant among his countrymen, but this belief is now exploded. It is improbable that Geoffrey was a Welshman, and pretty certain that he used no Welsh sources. "We must then think of Geoffrey as probably rather of 'Breton than of Welsh blood, as brought up in a 'Norman environment, on the Welsh marches, but far 'from Welsh life, and as connected by origin with the 'political domination of Robert of Gloucester, and 'by profession with the ecclesiastical circle of Oxford 'and Lincoln."¹ According to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, his history is compiled from Nennius and a lost book of Breton legends, while the first part of it, according to Chambers,² is "obviously 'a literary exercise on the Virgilian model." This tends to support the view of Dr. Lewis,³ that Arthur is a combination of Atreus, Thyestes, and other heroes, and that the whole Arthurian cycle was derived originally from classical sources. Chambers also accuses Geoffrey of "modelling Arthur's personality, court and conquests upon those of Charlemagne."⁴

Anyhow, it seems certain that, apart from Nennius, Geoffrey had no British sources whatever, since "the 'only Welsh treatment of Arthur for which, in its 'written form, at least, an origin before the late 'eleventh or early twelfth-century can be seriously

¹ Chambers, *Arthur of Britain*, p. 24.

² *Ibid.*, p. 31.

³ C. B. Lewis, *op. cit.*, pp. 248 seq.

⁴ Chambers, *Arthur of Britain*, p. 56.

"claimed, consists of obscure allusions in poems "difficult to translate."¹ Apart from these and the story of Kulhwch and Olwen, which is believed to date from about 1100, and in which Arthur is treated in a highly mythological manner, there appears to be no Welsh account of Arthur which is not derived from Geoffrey.

There is not a word in Geoffrey which is more reliable than his account of Arthur's Continental campaign, of which Sir John Rhys writes that "it appears "on the whole that Arthur's subjugation of the west of "Europe was directly or indirectly founded on the "mythic invasion of Hades by him in the character of "a Culture Hero,"² yet it is upon Geoffrey that those stories and poems are based which have given rise to a belief in Arthur's historicity. It is to these stories and poems that Chambers really refers when he speaks of "the historical Arthur,"³ and Elton when he says that "his existence is admitted."⁴ We have seen that there is no evidence which can be admitted as historical, and even such traditions as exist are purely mythological.

Let us take a few examples of the latter. There were three red-tracked ones of Britain, but a greater was Arthur; for a year no grass or herb grew where one of the three trod, but for seven years where Arthur trod. There were three eminent prisoners, but a greater was Arthur, who was thrice for three nights in magic prisons. He pursued with his whole army a magic sow from Wales to Cornwall; he fought with giants and monsters, the latter including a huge cat. He had a magic sword and various other articles of magical equipment. He is the wild huntsman, and as we have seen, the knight who sleeps in a cave. The ecclesiastical traditions tell us that St. Cadoc agreed to pay Arthur a hundred red and white cows, but when the cows reached Arthur they turned into bundles of fern. Also

¹ Chambers, *Arthur of Britain*, p. 59.

² *Arthurian Legend*, p. 11.

³ *Arthur of Britain*, p. 207.

⁴ Op. cit., p. 363.

that Arthur visited St. Padarn and coveted his tunic, whereupon the saint caused the earth to open and swallow Arthur, and keep him a prisoner till he apologized. This is the kind of treatment that was meted out to demons, and it would therefore seem that the early Church regarded Arthur as a demon. Why it should do so I shall suggest presently; here we will merely note that while the traditions associate Arthur, his friends, and his foes with miracles of every description, the one thing that they do not say is that he fought against the Saxons; in fact, the Saxons play no part whatever in the traditions. If Arthur had been a real man, who achieved distinction by fighting against the Saxons, and if the traditions had any historical basis, some reference to his fights with the Saxons would be inevitable. It would, however, be difficult to find anything less suggestive of history than the traditional tales about Arthur.

Let us next consider Arthur's character as a landed proprietor. It has been suggested that the parts of Britain where there are places named after him might indicate the limits of his kingdom, and Chambers¹ has compiled a list of such places. They fall into five groups: (1) Cornwall, Devon, and Somerset; (2) The borders of England and South Wales; (3) North Wales; (4) a large area, including the north of England and the lowlands of Scotland as far north as Kincardine; (5) Brittany. It is absurd to suppose that there was in the sixth century a king whose kingdom embraced the whole of this area, and it is interesting to note that it corresponds pretty closely with the area of Brythonic place-names, with the curious exception of Central and West Wales. It is further to be noted that no real man has ever been commemorated in this way. Places are, of course, often called after people, but only if they have been built or inhabited by them. It is very rare to find a natural feature called after a real person, yet Arthur's property consists almost entirely of hills, rocks, and caves, where, as

¹ *Arthur of Britain*, pp. 183 seq.

Chambers says,¹ he has to take his turn as godfather with the giants, the devil, and Robin Hood.

He is also connected with Roman sites, and on this Professor Gruffydd observes: "Archæologists still 'hope to find Arthur's Round Table at Cærleon on 'Usk; they have not yet realized that the old caers of 'the Romans were to the Britons, in whose minds these 'legends grew, the symbols of a great past in which 'they had no part, and it was the wistful memory of 'ancient greatness which made them connect their 'Arthur, born in evil times of good old Roman blood, 'with the relics of that greatness which they saw about 'them.'²

That Arthur was of Roman, or indeed of any human, blood there is, as we have seen, no evidence that can be admitted, and scholars, specially Welsh scholars, who are apt to live in a fictitious past, do not realize that illiterates always live in a very real present. The probability is that the Welsh of the seventh or eighth centuries, having lost all memory of the Romans, as well as of the art of building in stone, attributed the Roman walls to supernatural agency. The German peasants, as we saw,³ attribute the Roman wall to the devil, but in Wales the devil had not yet dispossessed the old gods of the land.

There has, of course, been a great deal of discussion as to the meaning of the name "Arthur." The Euhenists would make it a corruption of the Latin "Artorius"; others derive it from the Welsh *arth*, "bear," which derives support from the fact that he is or was identified with the constellation of the Great Bear.⁴

Mr. Briffault would derive it from the Welsh *arrdhu*, "very black," and concludes that "'the Black One,' 'leader of battles, is identical with 'Bran,' 'the Raven,' 'the leader in battle of the Celts in every war which

¹ *Arthur of Britain*, p. 183.

² W. J. Gruffydd, *Math vab Mathonwy*, p. 346.

³ p. 34.

⁴ J. H. Parry, *The Cambrian Plutarch*, p. 3.

"they have fought throughout the ages."¹ It is possible that Bran is a form of Brennus, and that the Brennus who is said to have led the Celtic armies in Italy, Greece, and Asia, is equivalent to the Bran who led Celtic armies in Ireland, and who, according to Welsh tradition, was the son of Llyr, the father of Caractacus, and the converter of the Britons to Christianity. There seems no doubt that the latter was a god who was identified with the raven. The connection of "Arthur" with *arddhu* is improbable, but if his name does not mean "black," Arthur has certainly been identified with the raven,² and also with the chough.³

Real men are not identified with ravens, or with bears, and it is possible that both Bran and Arthur had the form of a raven (or bear) banner, which was borne at the head of the armies. We are told that the Norse had such banners. Asser relates that in 878 the men of Devon gained a victory over the pagans, and captured from them the standard called Raven. "They say that "the sisters of Hingwar and Hubba, daughters of "Lodobroch, wove that flag and got it ready in one day. "They say, moreover, that in every battle, wherever "that flag went before them, if they were to gain the "victory a live crow would appear flying in the middle "of the flag; but if they were doomed to be defeated it "would hang down motionless, and this often proved "to be so."⁴ Sigurd, Earl of Orkney, is said to have had a banner which brought victory to those before whom it was borne, but a speedy death to him who bore it. "It was made in raven's shape; and when the "wind blew out the banner, then it was as though the "raven spread his wings for flight."⁵ I can find no account of the banners of the Celts, but Cuchulainn

¹ R. Briffault, *The Mothers*, vol. iii, pp. 432, 433 n.

² R. Briffault, loc. cit., J. Rhys, *Celtic Folklore*, vol. ii, p. 611.

³ R. Hunt, *Popular Romances of the West of England*, p. 309.

⁴ J. A. Giles, *Six O.E. Chronicles*, p. 62.

⁵ *The Orkneyingers' Saga*, tr. Dasent, p. 15.

had a very sacred over-mantle of raven's feathers, which was worn by his charioteer.¹

The view that Arthur was a god, however, does not depend upon his connection with a raven banner; it is really implicit in all that we are told of him. It explains why the early saints are said to have treated him so unceremoniously; it explains why the Breton followers of the Norman kings located his legends in Sicily;² above all, it explains the strange company that he keeps. "Arthur has none but mythological relatives," says Mr. Briffault;³ "his father is the dragon Uther, "his sister the goddess Anu, his wife the 'White Lady,' "his mistress or sister Morgana, the fairy." "The 'Knights of the Round Table,'" says Elton,⁴ "Sir Kaye and Tristram and bold Sir Bedivere, betray their "divine origin by the attributes which they retain as "heroes of romance." Of Kei we are told, in *Kulhwch and Olwen*, that among other faculties "he could "breathe nine nights and nine days under water," and that, when it pleased him, "he became as tall as the "loftiest tree in the forest." In such company a real man would be like Gulliver in Brobdingnag.

Sir John Rhys⁵ supposes that there were two Arthurs, a mythical and a historic, but whereas he has a great deal to say about the former, he merely mentions the latter. Some recent writers have been less cautious; according to Mr. Crawford, as we have seen, Arthur was a "petty chieftain," while Mr. Hodgkin⁶ describes him as "the harassed leader of a rough war-band." Such statements may sound reasonable enough, but they are really Euhemerism run to seed. There is some excuse for believing that Robin Hood was a real outlaw, the boldest and most famous of his age, but none for supposing that he was one of a

¹ J. Dunn, *The Tain*, p. 187.

² Chambers, *Arthur of Britain*, p. 221.

³ Loc. cit.

⁴ Op. cit., p. 248.

⁵ *Arthurian Legend*, p. 8.

⁶ R. H. Hodgkn, *History of the Anglo-Saxons*, vol. i, p. 182.

what his purpose was, what his authorities were, nor even what he actually says.

"The scope of the *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*," says its editor,¹ "is sufficiently indicated by its title. After some observations upon the position, inhabitants, and natural productions of Britain, the author gives a rapid sketch of its history from the earliest period until the arrival of Augustine in A.D. 597, at which era, in his opinion, the ecclesiastical history of our nation had its commencement. . . . This is the period at which Beda ceases to speak of himself as a compiler, and assumes the character of a historian." He deals at some length, and not always accurately, with the Romans in Britain, but skims over the fifth and sixth centuries, and only mentions the pagan Saxons three times. The first mention is the story of Hengist and Horsa; the second is the account of Ambrosius, quoted from Gildas, and the third, placed out of its order, is the story of the "Halleluja Victory" from the legendary *Life of St. German*. The setting of this story suggests that in its original form it was the account, not of a temporal victory over the barbarians, but of a spiritual victory over the demons of heresy.

It is a remarkable fact, though it seems to have been little remarked, that *Beda* makes no mention of the settlement of his own ancestors in his own country of Northumbria.² From this we may conclude that the subject had no interest for him, for though the facts were probably lost, we may be sure that the Northumbrian Angles had some traditions or myths which he could have accepted as history, just as he accepted the miracles of St. German as history.

It is quite clear, in fact, that he had no interest in pagans or paganism at all. His introductory chapters are drawn from classical or ecclesiastical sources, and such facts as he mentions merely form a framework

¹ J. Stevenson, op. cit., p. xxii.

² It is remarked by Professor Chadwick, *Origin of the English Nation*, p. 35.

for accounts of conversions, persecutions, and martyrdoms; of the miracles of saints; and of the victories of the faithful over heretics and infidels. To this the sole exception is the story of Hengist and Horsa, and this is less of an exception than it might seem, since the outline of it is derived from Gildas, and several passages are quoted verbatim. Gildas tells us how "at "that time all the members of the assembly, along with "the proud tyrant, are blinded; such is the protection "that they find for their country . . . that these wild "Saxons of accursed name, hated by God and Men, "should be admitted into the island, like wolves into "folds, in order to repel the northern nations." He goes on to tell, with many wails and Biblical quotations, how "a brood of whelps from the lair of the "savage lioness" came in three ships, "fixed their dreadful talons in the eastern part of the island," and completely devastated the whole country.¹ He makes no mention of Vortigern,² of the Jutes, or of Hengist and Horsa.

From this account *Beda* omits the rude remarks about the Saxons, and to it he makes a number of additions. Thus he says that those who came over in the three ships, having gained a victory over the northerners, were followed by a greater number from "their own country. . . . Which, being added to the "former, made up an invincible army." He goes on to tell us that "those who came over were of the three "most powerful nations of Germany, that is, of the "Saxons, the Angles, and the Jutes."³ He seems to imply that the original fleet of three ships was composed of one shipload each of the Saxons, Angles, and

¹ H. Williams, *Gildas*, pp. 53-5.

² In some versions the words "proud tyrant" are followed by the name Uortigern or Gurthigern, but the editor gives good reason to believe that these names are interpolated (p. 52 n.). The accusation of incest brought by later writers against Vortigern is probably derived from a similar charge brought by Gildas against his contemporary Vortipor, a king of West Wales (p. 73).

³ *Beda*, ch. 15.

Bedford, and Eynsham near Oxford. Six years later they gained a great victory over three kings of the Britons at Dyrham, in Gloucestershire, and took Gloucester, Cirencester, and Bath.

Archæology shows that this story is pure fiction. The facts seem to be that no Saxon ever landed on the south coast; that no Saxon entered Hampshire until well on in the seventh century; but that, on the other hand, Saxons were well established in Gloucestershire by the middle of the sixth century.

The Saxons, like the Franks, were in pagan times in the habit of burying quantities of weapons, ornaments, and utensils with the dead, and since a very large number of these graves has been found, the area of pagan Saxondom can be determined pretty accurately, and the graves dated approximately by a comparative study of their contents. If then Hampshire had been closely settled by the West Saxons from the close of the fifth century, as the *Chronicle* tells us that it was, it is inconceivable that some graves of pagan Saxons should not have been found in the county, yet "in the "whole of Hampshire, outside the Jutish district, not a "single cemetery is known. . . . If the traditions are "to be credited with the minutest particle of truth, "nothing is more certain than that the invaders who "entered Britain from the South did not reach the "Thames Valley before the middle of the sixth century, "by which time there are excellent reasons for con- "cluding that settlements had been established there, "dating at least fifty years earlier."¹ The cemetery at Fairford, eight miles from Cirencester, is a very large one, and many objects found in it can be dated not later than the middle of the sixth century, so that "the "whole account of the campaign must be regarded with "the gravest suspicion."²

Mr. Leeds has more recently resurveyed the evidence concerning the Saxon occupation of Wessex, and concludes that "the archæologist is bound once for all to "discard the entries in the *Chronicle* as worthless. . . .

¹ E. T. Leeds, op. cit., pp. 51-2.

² *Ibid.*, p. 61.

"The archæological evidence can only be interpreted "to mean that the Saxons entered Hampshire and "Wiltshire at an advanced date in the period of the "settlement, and that too from the north."¹

Such evidence as we have, then, shows, or seems to show, that the accounts given by *Beda* and by the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* of events in England during the fifth and sixth centuries are not merely unreliable, but quite untrue. The chief reason, I believe, why scholars accept fiction as fact, is that by accepting it as fact they are absolved from the necessity of explaining it, whereas fictions need to be explained. In this case what we have to explain is:—

(1) Why the only secular story which *Beda* introduces into his ecclesiastical history should be a fiction from Kent.

(2) Why the first invaders of Kent should be represented as Jutish leaders of an Anglo-Saxon army, when they were really Franks operating quite independently of the Anglo-Saxons.

(3) Why the Saxon conquerors of Wessex and Sussex should be represented as entering by sea from the south, when they really entered by land from the north.

Beda tells us that his principal assistant in his work was Albinus, who was abbot of Canterbury, and that through him he obtained an account of all that had been transacted in the church of Canterbury. "Bede's correspondents, the educated clergy in Kent, were presumably in contact with traditions about the early 'history of their people,'" says Mr. Hodgkin,² but whatever applies to them should apply to *Beda* himself, and he quite clearly was not in touch with traditions about the early history of his people. Moreover, he was an Englishman, whereas Albinus was a foreigner. Why should the latter take an interest in one particular aspect of pagan Saxondom?

¹ *Antiquaries' Journal*, 1933, pp. 248–9.

² Op. cit., vol. i, p. 95.

This brings us to question number two, and the answer I suggest is that the story was a piece of propaganda. Part of it was unquestionably derived from Gildas, and part very likely from myth, but no combination of Gildas and myth could give such a series of categorical falsehoods. The aim of the Kentish ecclesiastics was to make Canterbury the religious capital of England. They had Augustine to support their claim, and Gildas could easily be made to follow suit. What simpler than to place all the incidents of early Anglo-Saxon history in Kent, and make their king's ancestor the commander-in-chief of all the Anglo-Saxons? That they did so is, of course, merely a conjecture, but it seems to explain the facts, and pious frauds of this (and every other conceivable) type were a commonplace of medieval ecclesiasticism. The story no doubt grew with time, since the *Chronicle* knows more about Hengist and Horsa than *Beda* did, but the "local traditions," upon which Gomme, as we saw¹ relies, seem not to be older than the eighteenth century. Horsa's memorial, if it ever existed, was unknown in Alfred's time, since *Beda's* mention of it is omitted from the translation of his history which was then made. "Its site was fixed at Horstead, near Aylesford, after many conjectures by the antiquaries, "chiefly it would seem because the great cromlech in "that neighbourhood had already been allotted to "Prince Catigern. The ruins of another Stone-Age "tumulus were found at a little distance . . . and it "was supposed that the chieftain might have been "carried up from the battlefield two miles away to lie "near his enemy's tomb. When certain antiquaries "visited the place in 1763 the villagers showed them a "heap of flints which had all the appearance of being "refuse stones thrown up by the farmer, and this has "since that time been accepted as the site of the ancient "monument. One point being fixed, it became easy "to identify the rest; and hence the apparent certainty with which localities have been settled for

¹ Above, p. 37.

"almost all the events in the legend of Hengist and Horsa."¹

If ecclesiastics invented this legend, it is most unlikely that they invented the names, which seem to mean "the Stallion" and "the Mare." Perhaps they were deities worshipped in the form of horses, or borne at the head of the armies in the form of horse-head standards.

Our third question was why the Saxons should have been represented as entering southern England from the sea, when they really entered it from the Thames Valley. When we examine the *Chronicle* stories of the landings, which I have sketched above, we find that they all bear a suspicious resemblance to the legend of Hengist and Horsa. The story told, with slight variations, in each case, is how two heroes, descendants of Woden, land from three ships. They gain a minor victory near the shore, and then, after pushing further inland, a complete victory which results in their becoming kings of the land. One of the heroes dies, and is buried in a city which bears his name; the other becomes the founder of a dynasty.

There seem to be two possible ways of explaining this story; one is that it is a genuine myth, the common property of all the tribes, and the other, that it is the Hengist legend adapted to the circumstances of other kingdoms. In either case we should have to suppose that there was a "Jutish" kingdom on the mainland, as well as in the Isle of Wight, but that is quite likely. The latter explanation is rendered the more probable by the fact that several of the names are clearly fictitious. Thus the name "Port" is derived from the Latin name of Portsmouth, Portus Magnus, while "Wihtgar" is from Wihtgarasburg, "Wight-dwellers"- "town," now Carisbrooke. Cerdic, also, is only mentioned in connection with Cerdices-ora, Cerdicesford, and Cerdiceslea, and Cerdic is a Celtic name.² We have seen that natural features are seldom called after

¹ C. Elton, op. cit., p. 379.

² C. W. Oman, *England Before the Norman Conquest*, p. 224.

real men; perhaps the West Saxons traced their royal line back to the oldest Celtic king they could hear of, and Cerdic descendant of Brand is Caradoc (Caractacus) son of Bran; perhaps Cerdic was a Celtic deity after whom some places were named; in any case, there is no reason to suppose Cerdic more historical than Port or Wihtgar. There can be little doubt that these legends were composed by ecclesiastics in imitation of, and perhaps in opposition to, the legend of Hengist. The editor of the *Chronicle* suggests Winchester as the place where it is most likely to have been compiled,¹ and the compiler probably found these legends at the head of the annals of each monastery, and supposing them to be records of fact, tried to combine them into a narrative, but with singular lack of success.

We may throw over the alleged early history of Wessex with the more confidence since we know that the later history is quite unreliable. Cadwaladr, king of the Welsh, is said to have resigned his kingdom, made a pilgrimage to Rome, and died there in 688, "but great obscurity seems to hang over the accounts "of this performance; and as this, and other actions in "the life of that Prince, are related in almost the same "words of his contemporary Cædwalla, King of the "West Saxons, who died in Rome in that year, there is "reason to believe that the monkish historians have "confounded the one with the other."² Yet the fictions, the miracles, and the blunders of these old monks are allowed, not merely to occupy chapters and even volumes of so-called history, but to oppose a serious obstacle to the progress of scientific archæology.

¹ E. E. C. Gomme, op. cit., p. viii.

² R. Rees, *The Welsh Saints*, p. 65.

CHAPTER VIII

CUCHULAINN

THE tendency of the Greeks in classical times was all towards rationalization. As a result of this, the supernatural beings, whatever one chooses to call them, who had played their parts in early religion, came to be divided into two separate, though never entirely separate, classes. There might be some doubt whether Heracles or Asclepios was a god or a hero, but throughout classical times it was sought increasingly to draw a clear distinction between heroes, who never performed miracles, and gods, who never did anything else.

This attempt by the Greek philosophers to construct a clear-cut theology out of a large number of religious rites, in which both names and theories were little regarded, has led many scholars to misunderstand completely the character of early Greek religion, and of early religion generally. On the assumption that the ideas of a god or of a hero are primitive, they have argued either that the gods were heroes who had been promoted, or that the heroes were gods who had become "faded," or even that the two sets of beings had no connection at all. They then discuss whether the rites performed at various sacred spots should be described as the "tendance" of heroes or the worship of gods, failing to realize that these rites came down from pre-literate times, and that illiterates are no more capable of theology than they are of history. Theology involves definitions, comparisons, classifications, and distinctions, and can therefore develop only in the minds of people who are working over written material, and then only if circumstances permit. In Ireland, unlike Greece, they did not permit. In pagan Ireland there was no writing, and therefore no theology, so that no attempt was made to distinguish between gods

and heroes. Then came Christianity, and what had been the recognized religion became the unrecognized religion, and has largely remained so until to-day. The cloak of pseudo-historicity thrown by the Church over certain of the figures of mythology has deceived some scholars brought up on the classics, but in the traditions gods and heroes have remained undifferentiated.

Mr. Nutt says that in the tenth century the process of transforming "the inmates of the ancient Irish 'Olympus into historic kings and warriors had already 'begun,'"¹ but it was never completed. The miracles were never rationalized, nor were the characters represented as living the lives of human beings. "I found it impossible to arrange the stories in a coherent form," says Lady Gregory,² "so long as I considered them a part of history. I tried to work on 'the foundation of the Annalists, and fit the Fianna 'into a definite historical epoch, but the whole story 'seemed trivial and incoherent until I began to think 'of them as almost contemporaneous with the Battle 'of Magh Tuireadh, which even the Annalists put back 'into mythical ages. In this I have only followed some 'of the story-tellers, who have made the mother of 'Lugh of the Long Hand the grandmother of Finn '.... It seems to me that one cannot choose any 'definite period either from the vast living mass of 'folk-lore or from the written text, and that there is as 'good evidence of Finn being of the blood of the gods 'as of his being, as some of the people tell me, 'the son 'of an O'Shaughnessy, who lived at Kiltartan Cross.' This clearly indicates the datelessness which characterizes the genuine traditional narrative.

It would require a volume even to summarize the stories of the Irish traditional heroes, so I shall let the story of perhaps the most famous one, Cuchulainn, do duty for the remainder.

It is difficult to get the incidents of Cuchulainn's career into any sort of order, but the following is an

¹ A. Nutt, *The Voyage of Bran*, vol. i, p. 189.

² *Gods and Fighting Men*, p. 467.

approximation. His conception and birth are attended by various miracles, after which we next hear of him at the age of five, when he makes a long journey alone to the court of his uncle, King Conchobar of Ulster. He forthwith defeats at all forms of sport and military exercises the hundred and fifty members of the king's boy corps, and knocks them over fifty at a time.

His next feat is to destroy with his hands alone a very large and fierce dog; when he finds that it is the watch-dog of Culann the smith, he offers to take its place, and though his real name is Setanta, he is known henceforth as Cuchulainn, "the dog of Culann."

When not yet seven he demands arms of Conchobar, and smashes all that are offered him till he obtains Conchobar's own. With these, and with the aid of two supernatural horses which he captures, he makes a raid over the border, kills three of the fiercest champions of Ireland, and returns with their heads and other trophies. One of these champions the "little lad" kills by striking him on the forehead with an iron ball, after which he cuts off his head.¹

Later on he woos Emer, who will not accept him unless he can perform a number of feats, which include the killing of twenty-seven men at one blow. He eventually achieves these and marries her, having in the meantime married Uatach; had a son, Connla, by Aoife; and lived for some time with the goddess Fand, wife of Manannan mac Lir.

The rest of his story is taken up principally with the "Cattle-spoil of Cooley." Queen Maeve or Medb of Connaught wishes for the "Brown Bull of Cooley," and in order to obtain it invades Ulster with all the warriors of the rest of Ireland. The men of Ulster suffer from a peculiar disability which puts them all temporarily out of action, and meanwhile Cuchulainn defends Ulster single-handed, killing a number of champions in single combat, and the rank and file of the enemy at a steady rate of a hundred a day. Eventually the Ulstermen come up; they are attacked and

¹ J. Dunn, op. cit., p. 71.

slaughtered in large numbers, but Cuchulainn single-handed restores the battle, and the invaders are routed. After an interlude in the form of a bull-fight the Irish again invade Ulster, and after a number of miraculous events Cuchulainn is killed with his own spear.

What are we to make of this story? The views that have been put forward fall, for the most part, into three types. We will let Sir William Ridgeway stand for the first type, that of those who believe that you can reduce any legend to history by making your own selection from its incidents. He proves the historicity of Cuchulainn in a very simple way: "Though his exploits are often supernatural, there is no more reason for regarding him as a god than there is for so treating 'Achilles, Ajax, or Roland.'¹ He believes, in fact, like other Euhemerists, that a lay figure propped up with other dummies is really standing by itself. He also asserts that the heroes "appear in settings shown by irrefragable historical and archæological evidence to be that of the age in which they are severally said to have lived."² There is, however, no historical evidence at all, and the archæological evidence, so far as it suggests anything definite, suggests the period, about the sixth century, when the stories were first written down. Cuchulainn had seven pupils in each eye, seven fingers on each hand, and seven toes on each foot; and he performed some of his most remarkable feats when he was seven years old. The belief that such a monster can be reduced to the status of a human being by the simple process of subtracting his superfluous pupils and digits, and adding an equivalent number to his years, is gradually falling into discredit among mythologists.

A second view of the Cuchulainn stories is that they are sun myths;³ I shall later try to show that there is no such thing.

The third view is that the stories are a magnificent

¹ *Early Age of Greece*, vol. ii, p. 548.

² *Ibid.*, p. 609.

³ E. Hull, *The Cuchullin Saga*, p. lxviii.

example of what the Irish imagination can do when it really gets going. I shall deal later with the part played by imagination in the formation of myth, but I would here point out that there seems not to be a single incident in, or feature of, the stories of Cuchulainn or any other Irish hero, which is not found elsewhere. Cuchulainn is in several versions said to be the son, or reincarnation of Lugh, and Lugh is recognized as identical with the Welsh Lleu, and the Gaulish deity Lug, from whom Lugdunum, the modern Lyons, derives its name. Cuchulainn himself is probably a variant of Gawaine, since the latter's name also means "smith" and they have parallel adventures. The story of Cuchulainn and the Terrible, for example, corresponds with that of Gawaine and the Green Knight; in each case the stranger challenges the hero to behead him and then submit to being beheaded himself. The stranger is beheaded, and goes off carrying his head; returning at the appointed time, he causes the hero to kneel down, but instead of beheading him, merely gives him a light blow.¹ There are differences which suggest that both were derived from a common source rather than that one was derived from the other; the same applies to the David and Goliath story which I mentioned above.

These resemblances have, of course, been noticed by many writers; I will quote Wood-Martin² on some of them. "There is a great similarity between the Persian "story of Rustam and the bardic tale of Conloch:³ an "Irish chief and King Midas were both afflicted with "ass's ears; a king of Macedon and also a king of Erin "effected the destruction of their enemies by apparel- "ling a number of young men to represent women. "Thersites and Conan were both bald, were great "boasters, and great cowards; Balor and Perseus in "some respects resemble each other; in both stories the

¹ E. Hull, op. cit., p. xxvi.

² W. G. Wood-Martin, *Pagan Ireland*, p. 30.

³ Or Connla; it is rare to find two writers spelling the same Irish name in the same way.

"precautions taken are almost identical—precautions "which were defeated by supernatural means—and in "both instances the decree of destiny is fulfilled by the "murder of the grandfather, while the peculiar pro- "perty of Balor's eyes has its parallel in classic myth. "The infant Hercules strangles a serpent while yet in "his cradle; the great Irish hero Cuchullin when a "child strangles a huge watch-dog, the terror of the "country-side. The Greek Adonis and the brave and "gay Diarmuid O'Duibhne are each killed by a boar." The important part played by boars in the stories suggests that they are not of native origin, since, according to the same author,¹ no remains of wild pig have been found in Ireland, though the domestic pig seems to have been introduced at an early period. However this may be, the stories are known to have existed in Greece a thousand years before they are known to have existed in Ireland, so that, to those whose belief in coincidence is not unlimited, the probability of their Irish origin is remote. It may be added that Sir John Rhys² devotes two chapters to the tracing of parallels between the adventures of Heracles, Cuchulainn, and the Welsh Peredur.

Some of the chief incidents in Cuchulainn's career are, as we have seen, connected with the Tain Bo Cuailgne, or Cattle Spoil of Cooley, which is in great part the elaborated account of a bull-fight. There were sacred bull-fights in ancient Crete, as there are in modern Spain, and since domestic cattle did not originate in Ireland, it is unlikely that the myths and ritual connected with them originated in Ireland either.

According to some accounts his boyhood's feats took place when he was seven, the Cattle Spoil when he was seventeen, and his death when he was twenty-seven. These figures have obviously no relation to any real dates, since according to other accounts he fought with and killed his own son before the Cattle Spoil,³

¹ Op. cit., p. 13.

² *Arthurian Legend*, pp. 184 seq.

³ J. Dunn, op. cit., p. 263.

and sound like the reminiscence of a ten-year ritual cycle. Such a cycle, I shall later suggest, is to be found in the Tale of Troy, in which the Rape of Helen, the beginning of the siege, and the fall of Troy take place at intervals of about nine years, with complete blanks between them.

We have still to decide who or what Cuchulainn was. Some of those who disbelieve all the stories are nevertheless inclined to suppose that he was a real person. Mr. Nutt, for example,¹ holds that while 99–100ths of what was ascribed to him bore no relation to historic fact, yet it was possible that such a man did actually exist about the date traditionally assigned to him. Yet, as we saw in Chapter I, tradition never has assigned and never could assign a date to anything, and we have no more reason to believe in the historicity of Cuchulainn than in that of Cyclops, or Cerberus, or any other being with an abnormal number of features.

Was he then a god? This depends on what we mean by a god. If by a god is understood a being in the sky, then, though he can receive prayer and sacrifice, no stories can be told about him. To become the hero of a story he must come to earth in some form. What was Cuchulainn's form? Let us allow Miss Hull to tell us. “On the morrow Cuchullin came to view the host; “also to exhibit himself in his form of beauty to the “wives and womankind and girls and lasses, to the “poets and professors of the men of Erin. . . . Three “sets of hair he had; next to the skin of his head, “brown; in the middle, crimson; that which covered “him on the out-side formed as it were a diadem of “gold. . . . About his neck were a hundred linklets of “red gold that flashed again, with pendants hanging “from them. His headgear was adorned with a hun-“dred mixed carbuncles, strung. On either cheek four “moles he had: a yellow, a green, a blue, a red. In “either eye seven pupils, as it were seven sparkling “gems. Either foot of the twain was garnished with

¹ Op. cit., p. 200.

"seven toes; both this and that hand with as many fingers; each one of which was endowed with clutch "of hawk's talon, with grip of hedgehog's claw." There follows a long description of his gorgeous clothing, after which we are told that he had "a trusty special shield, in hue dark crimson, and in its circumference armed with a pure white silver rim. At his left side a long and golden-hilted sword. Beside him in the chariot, a lengthy spear. . . . In one hand he carried nine heads, nine also in the other; the which in token of valour and skill in arms he held at arm's-length, and in sight of all the army shook."¹

To some people this may seem to be a highly poetical description of an ideal hero, but to me it seems to be a perfectly matter-of-fact description of a very sacred and very monstrous idol, and of a rite in which this idol was the principal figure. What appears to have happened is that in the first place eighteen captives were sacrificed before Cuchulainn; this was no doubt to represent his victorious combats, and also to endow him with life and strength. The great idol was then adorned with all its finery and placed in its chariot, and the captives' heads were hung nine from each arm. Thus equipped Cuchulainn went in state all round among the people, conferring valour and victory upon the men, fertility upon the women, and prosperity upon all.

Rites of this type are widespread. Probably the best known is that of Juggernaut, in which a car containing an image of Vishnu is dragged round a prescribed route, conferring good fortune on all who see it. In ancient Babylon, at the New Year festival, the image of Marduk was carried in procession, and Dr. Oesterley believes that in Jerusalem before the Exile there was, at the Feast of Tabernacles, "a great procession "with Jahweh in his chariot."²

Such rites were common in Northern Europe. The image of the god Frey seems to have taken an annual

¹ E. Hull, op. cit., pp. 178-9; cf. J. Dunn, op. cit., pp. 195-6.

² *Myth and Ritual*, ed. S. H. Hooke, p. 136.

tour round Sweden, conferring fertility wherever it went. It was accompanied by a priestess called "Frey's "wife."¹ In Germany the goddess Ertha was periodically taken round in a car drawn by heifers, "it is a "season of rejoicing, and festivity reigns wherever she "deigns to go and be received."² In the fourth century of our era the mighty Mother was still worshipped at Autun, and her image was borne in procession on a car, in order to ensure the fertility of the fields and vineyards,³ while to this day "in Catholic countries the "statue of the local saint is commonly carried round "the village, either annually on his feast-day or in "times of exceptional trouble."⁴ Anyone who believes that these saints were real people will find reason to modify his opinion in Professor Saintyves' *Les Saints Successeurs des Dieux*.

I conclude:—

- (1) That there is no historical evidence for Cuchulainn's existence.
- (2) That none of his activities, as narrated in the stories, suggest those of a real human being.
- (3) That all or most of the incidents of his career find parallels in the careers of other mythical heroes.
- (4) That the description of him given above is obviously not that of a human being.
- (5) That rites closely resembling that which the passage quoted appears to describe are known to have been performed in France, Germany, and Sweden; that such rites are at any rate very likely to have been performed in Ireland; and that the central figures in such rites are not real people but images of gods.

¹ B. S. Phillpotts, *The Elder Edda*, p. 119.

² Tacitus, *Germania*, xl.

³ Cited by C. B. Lewis in *Folk-Lore*, vol. xlvi, p. 74.

⁴ E. K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, vol. i, p. 119.

CHAPTER IX

THE TALE OF TROY

We saw in the last chapter that Sir William Ridgeway compared Cuchulainn to Achilles and Ajax; in this chapter it will be our task to show that Achilles and Ajax are really as unhistorical as Cuchulainn. This may seem to be a rash undertaking, since dozens of scholars have written books about *Homer*, and almost all of them have assumed, as a matter of course, that the *Iliad* has an historical basis. It is to be noted, however, in the first place, that with the great majority of these scholars the historical aspect of the *Iliad* has been merely incidental to other aspects in which they were more deeply interested, those of poetry, prosody, and linguistics on the one hand, and the religion and politics of the fifth century B.C. on the other. Classical scholars are, in the second place, for the most part completely ignorant of and indifferent to comparative mythology and ritual, and therefore regard incidents to which parallels can be found in every continent as individual or even unique. Thirdly, of course, these scholars have been brought up in the superstition that tradition is history.

It is (fortunately for me, since my knowledge of Greek is extremely limited), unnecessary for my purpose that I should enter into the most trampled part of the arena of Homeric controversy. I shall not attempt to assign an author or a date to the poems, nor to decide in what dialect they were originally composed. My task will be to give adequate reasons for believing that they have no historical basis, and of these reasons the most convincing will, I hope, be that which shows that the assumption of their historicity results in a *reductio ad absurdum*.

Let us assume then that, miracles apart, the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and the cyclic poems are statements of

historic fact and that the incidents which they describe centre in a siege of Troy which took place about 1190 B.C. What do we then get? We get a history of Greece beginning, very shakily, about 1250 B.C., blossoming out into a good deal of detail about 1200 B.C., giving us the fullest and most intimate particulars for a period of about twenty years, and a certain number of facts for the next fifty, and then fading out completely for about four centuries. We are told that about 1000 B.C. "the whole of Greece except Athens was under 'Dorian rule and rapidly relapsed into barbarism; 'neither tradition nor archæology gives us a glimpse 'of what was taking place."¹ We are to believe that the most important events of Greek history, the conquests of the Ionians and Achæans and the settlement of Asia Minor, were completely forgotten, while the Dorian conquest was preserved merely in some vague anecdotes of some alleged sons of Heracles. On the other hand an earlier event, the siege of Troy, which, since it had no permanent results, was obviously less important, was remembered in every detail.

The absurdity of this assumption will be more apparent if we transfer the situation to English history. Let us equate Agamemnon with Alfred and the Dorian Conquest with the Norman Conquest; what do we then get? We should find English history beginning very shakily about A.D. 800; we should then have the fullest details about King Alfred and his Danish opponents, and know exactly what they ate, drank, wore, and said to their wives; what blows were struck in their battles and who were killed. Then we should get a rapidly decreasing body of fact till well before the Norman Conquest, of which we should have nothing but some vague stories of some Sons of Rollo, and after that nothing more till about 1400, when we should get the faint beginnings of a history which would burst out into full vigour under the Tudors. I do not suggest, of course, that the circumstances of England were exactly the same as those of Greece, but

¹ Peake and Fleure, *The Horse and the Sword*, p. 78.

are there any conceivable circumstances in which the English could have remembered every detail about Alfred, and completely forgotten Richard I, Edward I, and the Black Prince? Of course there are not, and there are no conceivable circumstances in which the Greeks could have remembered Agamemnon, if he had been a real man and not a god, and completely forgotten those that came after him. "Vixere fortis ante "Agamemnona," says the poet, but I would rather say, "Vixere fortis post Agamemnona," and that they would have eclipsed his fame had he really lived. For what is he alleged to have been? The leader of an army which took one city. The successive waves of Greek-speaking invaders who swept over Greece, Crete, the Islands, and the Asiatic coast, and even, if the inscriptions are rightly interpreted, ravaged as far as Palestine and Egypt, must have had many abler leaders, men whose names tradition would have preserved, if tradition ever preserved the names of historical persons.

Dr. Leaf¹ attempted to solve this difficulty by a method of his own. He supposed that the Greeks of the thirteenth century B.C. were great traders; that their most important trade was carried on with the Black Sea ports through the Dardanelles; that the King of Troy, by levying exorbitant tolls on vessels passing through the Dardanelles, rendered this trade unprofitable; and that so serious were the consequences of this interference with the sacred principles of free trade that all the Greeks were impelled, for the only time in their history, to unite for the purpose of destroying this enemy of their commerce, and to persist in this purpose, regardless of cost, until they had succeeded.

It says a great deal for the credulity of scholars that this theory has been so widely accepted, since not the smallest scrap of evidence can be adduced in its support. No ancient author knows of any reason for the siege of Troy except the rape of Helen, and there is

¹ W. Leaf, *Troy, and Homer and History*.

nowhere, even in the myths in which Dr. Leaf believed so firmly when it suited him, the slightest suggestion of trade with the Black Sea, or tolls, or anything of the kind. The only mythical voyage to the Black Sea was that of the Argo, and in that there is no mention of Troy; nor is the voyage of the Argo mentioned in the *Iliad*, though it is supposed to have occurred recently enough before the siege of Troy for Nestor to have taken part in both enterprises.

"The tale of the Argo," Dr. Leaf assures us,¹ "rested "on sailors' stories mingled with fantastic mythology. "The tale of Troy must from the first have been limited "by a tradition of actual facts. My conclusion is that "there existed a real record of real events, and that out "of this the *Iliad* grew." He does not explain why people should mingle fantastic mythology with sailors' stories, nor how either could arise in connection with places which were, on his own theory, familiar to every Greek trader. Nor is it clear what he means when he says that the tale of Troy must from the first have been limited by a tradition of actual facts, since elsewhere he tells us that "the larger part of the incidents we shall "of course dismiss as mere invention."²

Dr. Leaf's method is one which has been widely adopted by classical scholars. The process seems to be as follows. The scholar soaks himself in Homeric literature, and in nothing else, until all the incidents which seem to him realistic assume prominence, while those which seem improbable fade into the background; and eventually there arises in his mind a tale of Troy which is for him real and true, although it is entirely subjective. He then goes again through the literature and divides all the statements which he finds in it into two classes; those which fit in with his version become the genuine, original tradition, while those which do not are dismissed as embellishments or interpolations.

Thus Professor Halliday, speaking of the voyage of the Argo, asserts that "there is not a great deal of

¹ *Troy*, p. 328.

² *Homer and History*, p. 28.

"history left when the trimmings are shorn off, but on "the other hand, what there is is important. Jason's "voyage to the Black Sea was a real event, which "helped to make history."¹ Yet "there is no history, I "fear, to be got out of the legend of Perseus."² And Mr. Burn assures us that "though the legends contain "a core of historic truth . . . the poets considered "themselves justified in drawing freely upon their "imagination."³

Since the methods adopted by these and other scholars for extracting "history" from the legends are purely subjective, it is not surprising that no two of them agree as to what is history and what is not. We are to disbelieve most of what *Homer* wrote; we are to disbelieve a good deal of what Herodotus and Thucydides believed; yet unless we believe faithfully that 10, 20, or 30 per cent of the tale of Troy is true, we are excommunicate from the fellowship of scholars.

Why? Because it was, in common with many other myths, fables, and fallacies, accepted as fact in less critical times, and because it has an emotional appeal; most people obtain a thrill from stories of adventure and bloodshed, and the thrill is intensified if they can persuade themselves that the stories are true. Besides this, there are many students who pursue their researches with the same mental attitude as that of the reader of detective stories; all the clues are within the covers of the book itself, and can be followed up successfully by anyone who has sufficient application and ingenuity.

In both cases the test is verisimilitude, or what seems to be such. Any scene or incident which presents to the reader a convincing picture of prehistoric Greece, as he supposes it to have been, is evidence, if not proof, that such scene or incident is historically true. But, of course, such evidence is no evidence at all. Any

¹ W. R. Halliday, *Indo-European Folk-tales and Greek Legends*, p. 64.

² *Ibid.*, p. 126.

³ A. R. Burn, *op cit.*, p. 18.

competent novelist, if he would allow himself to be coached by a classical scholar, could write a novel of ancient Greece which would be far freer from inconsistencies, anachronisms, and absurdities than *Homer* is, and which would sound far more convincing to a modern European. Yet it might not contain a single word of historic fact.

Our scholars have, with rare exceptions, fallen into two serious errors of method. In the first place they have failed to realize that a literary work, be it the *Iliad* or any other, must be considered as a whole. We may conclude that it is fact, or myth, or fiction, or fiction founded on fact, but we are not entitled to divide it up into bits and to assume that some of these bits are fact and some fiction, according to the theories which we have formed from a study of the work itself. We may say, for example, that Shakespeare's *King John* is a work of fiction founded on fact, but we are not entitled to decide, from internal evidence alone, how much is fiction and how much fact. We can only achieve this by comparing the play with contemporary records. Such a comparison may be valuable, though not for historical purposes; as an aid to the study of English history the play is worthless. The same applies to *Homer*; we have, in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, works which obviously contain a great deal that is not historical fact. Even if we knew, which we certainly do not, that the poems were founded on fact, we should not be entitled to say that any one incident which they mentioned was historical, unless we had confirmation from a reliable source, and if we had such confirmation we should not, from the historical point of view, have any need of the poems. If for *King John* we substitute *King Lear* we shall have a truer comparison, since we have no corroboration for King Lear, and therefore do not regard him as historical.

The other error of method into which Homeric scholars have fallen is that of discussing the problems raised as if they were quite unconnected with any other problems. All are really general problems, problems

of tradition, of mythology, of poetry, particularly the origin of epic poetry, and of religion, particularly that of the active interference of gods in human affairs. Nobody is qualified to make any pronouncement on any of these problems, as they propound themselves in the *Iliad* or any other poetical work, unless he has studied them as general questions. Those who have discussed these questions, however, are almost without exception men brought up in the classical tradition, so that every discussion begins, instead of ending, with the tale of Troy.

The assumption that the tale of Troy is true has prevented recognition of the fact that there is no single incident in any epic poem for which there is historical confirmation. It is true, as we have seen, that the names of historic persons sometimes appear in myth, but that does not prove the historicity of the myth. The story of the burnt cakes is not proved to be true by the fact that Alfred is an historical person; in fact, its sole claim to historicity, which is, as we have seen, a false one, lies in the fact that Alfred was an historic person. But the heroes of the *Iliad* are not historic persons; we know Alfred from contemporary sources, but we know Achilles only from sources comparable to the story of Alfred and the cakes. I shall later try to demonstrate the mythical character of the Homeric heroes, but shall now show how myth becomes history in the hands of Homeric scholars.

The theory which they have put forward is that in the eleventh century B.C. the Dorians, a large and powerful Greek-speaking tribe of Nordic origin, invaded Greece, conquered most of it, and made the most far-reaching changes in its culture. "The Dorian invasion, 'which is passed over by Homer,'" says Professor Nilsson,¹ "resulted in the *débâcle* of the older civilization." This theory seems to be based first on the fact that the Greece of *Homer* differs in almost every possible respect from the Greece of history; and secondly, on the assertion of Herodotus and other

¹ M. P. Nilsson, *Homer and Mycenae*, p. 239.

classical writers that at a period which can be reckoned at about eighty years after the siege of Troy, the Peloponnesus was conquered by a tribe called the Dorians under the leadership of the sons of Heracles, from whom the Spartan kings claimed descent. The Greece of *Homer* is, however, in all probability a purely mythical country, and as for the Dorians, according to Herodotus,¹ they were a small tribe of northern Greece, and the sons of Heracles are always represented as *returning* from exile. There is nothing whatever in these stories to suggest the catastrophic invasion of an alien race, yet according to Professor Rose² they represent "the mythological form of the 'Dorian invasion, by which the Achaian civilization 'was brought to an end.' We are to understand, it seems, that a complete travesty of the facts can be sufficiently explained by labelling it 'mythological.'

There are, however, no facts to travesty. There is no reason to believe that the Dorians represent a later invasion. It is easy to contrast Sparta with Athens, but the Spartans were not typical Dorians, nor the Athenians typical non-Dorians, and the social system of Sparta, far from being north European, finds its closest parallels among the Masai and other tribes of East Africa. The Dorian dialect, which is all that distinguishes the Dorians as a whole from other Greeks, is emphatically the dialect not of northern but of southern Greece. The leading heroes of the *Iliad* were said to have come from Dorian lands, and the centres of the worship of Menelaus, of Helen, and of Zeus Agamemnon were in Sparta itself.

Mr. T. W. Allen³ asks us to believe that "there is "hardly any limit to the accuracy of Greek historical "memory"; then how came it that the Dorians of Crete and Argolis had forgotten their own history, but clearly remembered the history of those whom they had conquered and dispossessed? The story of the

¹ I, 56.

² H. J. Rose, *A Handbook of Greek Mythology*, p. 267.

³ *Homer—The Origin and Transmissions*, p. 82.

Dorian Conquest was invented by the scholars to justify them in believing in the historicity of *Homer*, and this although the story receives confirmation neither from *Homer* nor from any other classical source.

Mr. Allen speaks elsewhere¹ of "Homer, in his "historical capacity, as annalist of the Trojan war," but whatever *Homer* may have been, he certainly was not an annalist. An annalist is a man who records, year by year, the principal events of the year, and *Homer*, of course, attempted nothing of the kind. The belief that epic poetry is an early method of keeping historical records, though not peculiar to Mr. Allen, is carried by him to unusual lengths. He tells us that "in "the heroic age they liked to be told the news, and "failing that would put up with ancient history. At the "moment of the *Odyssey* the subjects asked for and "listened to were the last great events of contemporary "history, the siege of Troy and the return of the Greek "sovereigns. The audience could ask the bard to be- "gin the tale at any moment, the whole series was in "bardic memory."² It is incredible that people ever existed who could say, "You don't know what won the "Derby? Oh well, tell us a bit about the Norman "Conquest!" and on any theory it seems inconceivable that the Homeric poems were composed soon enough after the event for their contents to come as news to the Greeks.

Professor Nilsson also holds that "epic poetry al- "ways deals with historical persons and events, and it "may be inferred that its origin is to be found in the "praise of living men and the description of contem- "porary events."³ The examples which he gives, how- ever, suggest nothing of the kind, and his opinion may be contrasted with that of Professor Gilbert Murray,⁴ who asks, "Why do the Homeric poems all refer not

¹ Op. cit., p. 135.

² *Homer—The Origin and Transmissions*, p. 144.

³ Op. cit., p. 239.

⁴ *The Rise of the Greek Epic*, pp. 229–30.

"to any warfare that was going on at the time of their "composition, but to warfare of forgotten people "under forgotten conditions in the past? The fact is "certain. What shall one say of this? Merely that "there is no cause for surprise. It seems to be the "normal instinct of a poet, at least of an epic poet. The "earliest version of the *Song of Roland* which we pos- "sess was written by an Anglo-Norman scribe some "thirty years after the conquest of England. If the "Normans of that age wanted an epic sung to them, "surely a good subject lay ready to hand. Yet as a "matter of fact their great epic is all about Roland, a "not very important chieftain dead three hundred "years before, not about William the Conqueror. The "fugitive Britons of Wales made no epic to tell of their "conquest by the Saxons; they turned to a dim- "shining Arthur belonging to the vaguest past. "Neither did the Saxons who were conquering them "make epics about that conquest. They sang how at "some time long past a legendary and mythical "Beowulf had conquered a monstrous Grendel and "Grendel's mother and a dragon."

In the same connection Dr. Leaf remarks: "When "they [the Normans] crossed the Channel to invade "England, they seem to have lost all sense of their kin- "ship with the Saxons, and it is doubtful if they even "knew that their name meant Northmen. The war-song "which Taillefer chanted as they marched to battle was "not a Viking saga, but the song of Roland."¹ He realized that a people can completely forget their past within a hundred and sixty years, yet it never occurred to him to apply this fact to the study of the tale of Troy, any more than it has occurred to Professor Murray to compare the tale of Troy to the tale of Grendel.

The scholars invite us to suppose that Helen was a myth; that Hector was a poetical invention; that Achilles replaced Diomedes as principal hero; that Menestheus was put in to please the Athenians; and that Odysseus does not really belong to the story at all;

¹ *Homer and History*, p. 46.

but we must still, if we wish to be saved, believe that an army of sub-kings and feudal nobles, with their levies, under the command of Agamemnon, High King of Greece, spent ten years in besieging Troy, and eventually took and destroyed it.

Yet even when stripped to these bare bones, the story is full of glaring improbabilities. In the first place we know that it was a matter of the greatest difficulty to keep a feudal army in the field for ten weeks, let alone ten years. We are told that King Alfred's levies, which were besieging the Danish king, abandoned the siege and went home because "they "had stayed their term of service and consumed their "provisions."¹ The English armies in France were always on a mercenary basis, since the feudal levies refused to follow the king oversea. Froissart tells us that in 1341 the Scotch army insisted, in defiance of the king's wishes, on returning home with its plunder after twelve days in England.² Agamemnon and his army are very different; they "live in huts on the "beach, year out, year in, supporting themselves by "plunder and decimated by pestilences."³ And why? The recapture of Helen is the only motive alleged by the Greeks of historical times. To modern scholars, however, such a reason seems inadequate for a ten years' war, so other reasons have been invented. One, as we saw, is the stoppage of the Black Sea trade route, yet this is more obviously absurd, since if there was a trade route there must have been trading ships. The mouth of the Scamander, on Dr. Leaf's hypothesis, was a necessary port of call, and once the straits had been opened we should expect it to be thronged with ships laden with merchandise, at least for half the year, and to find the Greek camp abundantly supplied, and well up in the latest news from Greece. The hundred and fifty miles from Euboea to Troy can have been

¹ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, sub. A.D. 894.

² *Chronicles*, tr. T. Johnes, vol. i, p. 101; the fact may be untrue, but the practice is well attested.

³ G. Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

nothing to people who were accustomed to sailing to Colchis, eight hundred miles farther on. And why could not the kings and chiefs go home for the winter, as our own officers did as late as Marlborough's day? The answer is that while the siege is mythical, Dr. Leaf's ships and trade are simply fabulous.

Professor Nilsson rejects Dr. Leaf's theory, and supposes that the siege was the result of an expedition seeking booty,¹ but is it credible that a rich and powerful monarch, High King of all Greece, should abandon his kingdom and his family, and live for ten years in squalor on a beach a few days' sail from home, merely in the hope of sharing in the spoil of one city? Only to those who will clutch at any straw which they think may rescue them from the cold, clear water of critical investigation.

¹ Op. cit., p. 113.

possession of religious pre-eminence and the widest territorial rights.¹

I shall make no attempt to deal in any detail with non-European traditions, and for two reasons. The first is that the facts are far less readily accessible, and the second that those who are unconvinced by the preceding chapters would hardly be impressed by a chapter dealing with the traditional heroes of India or China. I have, however, satisfied myself that the same factors have operated to produce pseudo-history in Asia as in Europe.

There remains one group of traditions of which it is impossible to avoid some discussion, namely, the Jewish traditions embodied in the Old Testament. It is a necessary part of the thesis which I am putting forward in this book to show that whoever regards the Old Testament as an historical work, in the sense in which we understand history, entirely misunderstands its character.

In their scholarly *Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament*, Drs. Oesterley and Robinson tell us that the accounts of the building of the Temple given in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah are confused and contradictory, and that whereas it is alleged that Ezra preceded Nehemiah, the only possible conclusion that can be drawn from the evidence of the books themselves is that he really reached Jerusalem some fifty years later, and that the whole series of events is put about fifty years too early. "It will thus be seen," they conclude, "that the history of a considerable part of *Ezra-Nehemiah* is unreliable. This is to be accounted for: "(a) by the fact that our book is a compilation, and the sources have been unskilfully put together; (b) because the compiler's knowledge of the period of history dealt with was inadequate owing to the want of *data*; and (c) because the compiler had some pre-conceived ideas with which he coloured the history."²

They give the date of the arrival of Ezra as 397 B.C.,

¹ A. van Gennep, op. cit., p. 179.

² p. 124.

and of the compilation of the book as about 300 B.C.,¹ and according to the usual views of history and tradition there should have been ample data available. The events described, the return from the captivity, the building of the Temple, the expulsion of the foreign women, etc., were events which must have been known to the whole Jewish community, and must have created the most profound impression upon them. If historical events were ever preserved by "race-memory," here is a case in which they could not possibly have failed to be preserved; and that these memories, checked with the accurate records and annals which a literate people might be expected to keep, would produce a complete and accurate history seems, according to the theories of the professors,² a foregone conclusion. Yet we are told that the official writer, by combining "preconceived ideas" with an "unskilful" handling of "inadequate" data, produced a grossly inaccurate account of events of the highest importance which were less than a century old. And so far was anyone from questioning his narrative that at no very distant date it had come to be universally regarded as verbally inspired by the deity.

What explanation the believers in tradition put forward for these facts I have no idea, but the real explanation is that the compilers of the "historical" books of the Old Testament were not historians writing for students, but theologians writing for the faithful. "Primitive theology," says Dr. Schweitzer,³ "is simply a theology of the future, with no interest in history," but this is not quite accurate, since to the true whole-time theologian there is no past and no future. Change and decay are apparent and not real, since they are prevented from becoming real by a faithful performance of the ritual. The ritual which now is is that which was in the beginning, and it is the duty of the theological writer to ensure that it ever shall be. The

¹ p. 126.

² Including Professor Robinson himself, *v. supra*, p. 14.

³ *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, p. 342.

business of the priests is to perform the ritual with the maximum of regularity and solemnity, but in order that they may be able to carry out successfully their all-important task of renewing the world in the ritual they must have the whole-hearted support of the community, and this is to be secured by the establishment of the tradition.

Our professors have judged the compiler of *Ezra-Nehemiah* as an historian, and have convicted him of lack of skill, but in my view they have maligned him. The very idea of history was clearly quite foreign to him, and if a critic had attempted to explain to him the principles of historical criticism, he would have failed completely to understand what was meant, and would probably have regarded his critic as afflicted of God. The theory upon which he and his colleagues worked, from the historical point of view a totally false theory, as Professor Hooke and his colleagues have shown,¹ was that every detail of the ritual, as performed in 300 B.C., had been laid down by Moses. Where authority was required for injunctions, these could be put into the mouth of Moses, just as in China "to give these "words the requisite authority they are, in accordance "with invariable Chinese practice, put into the mouth "of an ancient worthy,"² but there were in existence records with which it was no doubt regarded as dangerous, or at least undesirable, to tamper. Where these records were manifestly irreconcilable with the ritual, it was obvious that they had somehow become corrupted, and it then became the duty of a compiler or editor to make the minimum of amendment necessary to bring the text into a tolerable degree of conformity with the facts, which to the theologian are, it must be repeated, not the facts of history but the facts of ritual. This our compiler achieved so successfully that his results remained uncriticized for over two thousand years.

The historicity of the Old Testament could, of

¹ Ed. S. H. Hooke, *Myth and Ritual* and *The Labyrinth*.

² A. Waley, *The Way and its Power*, p. 26.

course, be discussed at much greater length, but the foregoing may suffice to show that the historical facts cited, even where great accuracy might be expected, are quite unreliable, and that people who had, within a century, completely forgotten the events connected with the return from the Captivity, are unlikely to have preserved an accurate recollection of events which are alleged to have occurred five hundred or a thousand years before any attempt was made to record them.

PART II

MYTH

CHAPTER XI

THE GENESIS OF MYTH

WE have seen in the preceding chapters that there are no valid grounds for believing in the historicity of tradition, and I have suggested that some distinguished heroes of tradition are really heroes of myth, and that a saga, far from being a record of fact, is really a novel based chiefly upon myth.

Those who have made any study of myths have realized that a myth is not merely an untrue story; they have, however, given very different explanations of myth, explanations which fall into three main classes. What, as I shall try to show, are the wrong explanations, are firstly that a myth is a statement of historical fact clothed in more or less obscure language, and secondly that it is a fanciful or speculative explanation of a natural phenomenon. Having dealt with these I shall show that what a myth really is is a narrative linked with a rite.

Let us begin with the theory of what is known as the "historic myth." This theory is, or seems to be, that people who lived in ages more or less remote from our own felt an urge to transmit to their descendants the facts of their tribal or local history; for some obscure reason, however, they were unable to do this in straightforward language, and therefore had recourse to allegory. These old peoples, it is supposed, carefully transmitted the allegories, or myths, to their descendants, who have continued to repeat them ever since. Since, however, the myth-makers omitted to transmit the key, the purpose which they had in mind has been

frustrated, and the recipients of these myths invariably misunderstood them, either taking them literally or regarding them as a kind of sacred fairy-tale.

It seems to follow from this theory that if our ancestors had acquired the "historic myth" habit, we should now have no account of the Norman Conquest except a story of how a Frenchman married an English heiress against her will and took possession of her estate, and our only version of the Hundred Years' War would be a story of how one of our ancestors kept on jumping over a brook into his neighbour's garden.

In criticizing this theory, as put forward by Sir William Ridgeway and others, Mr. Alfred Nutt asked:¹ "Is there such a thing as an historic myth at all? Do "men commemorate tribal wanderings, settlements, "conquests, subjugations, acquisitions of new forms of "culture, or any of the other incidents in the collective "life of a people in the form of stories about individual "men and women? I do not deny the possibility of "their doing so; all I ask for is evidence of the "fact."

I cannot learn that anyone ever gave Mr. Nutt the evidence for which he asked, no doubt for the very good reason that there is no such evidence, but the theory is still widely held. It is a very convenient theory, since any scholar who has views of his own on the early age of Greece, or of Tahiti, is able to produce what he can regard as convincing evidence in their favour by dubbing some local myth an "historic "myth," and placing his own interpretation upon it. Now to take incidents from myth and represent them as literal history is bad enough, since, as we must continue to point out, there is no good reason to believe that a myth or any other traditional narrative has ever embodied an historic fact, but to take portions of myths and to represent them as saying something which they do not say, and which those who relate them have never supposed them to say, is infinitely worse. That such procedure is considered compatible

¹ *Folk-Lore*, vol. xii, p. 339.

with sound scholarship indicates the gulf which separates scholarship from science.

Let us start with Professor Gilbert Murray. He tells us that he strongly suspects the lists of men slain by the heroes of the *Iliad* to be tribal records condensed and, "of course," transferred from their original context. He has already given us one of these "tribal records." In the *Iliad* it is said that Phaeustus was slain by Idomeneus, and fell from his chariot with a crash. On this Professor Murray comments: "Idomeneus is the King "of Knossos in Crete, and Phaeustus is only known to "history as the next most important town in the same "island. That is to say, Phaeustus *is* the town, or the "eponymous hero of the town. . . . We may well "have in this passage a record of a local battle or con- "quest in Crete, torn up from its surroundings and "used to fill up some details of slaughter in a great "battle before Troy." Even if we admitted the possi- bility of historic myth, it would be difficult to explain why a town should be represented as falling from a chariot; why an eponymous hero should be invented for one town but not for the other; and why the poet should have recourse to Cretan records to fill in details of a battle before Troy, since he has imagination enough to enable him to make "mythological changes "and false identifications." Professor Murray has succumbed to the temptation to treat those portions of the *Iliad* which fit in with his theories as "real "history," and those which do not as "the emptiest "kind of fiction."¹

Dr. W. J. Perry tells us² that traditions are to be treated as something ranking as fact, and that if not forced to support any *a priori* view, but allowed to tell their own tale in their own time, they frequently serve to throw a flood of light on dark places. We soon find, however, that the traditions are not allowed to tell their tale in their own time, but must tell it in Dr. Perry's. In his view, tales of gods and culture heroes

¹ *The Rise of the Greek Epic*, pp. 220-3.

² *The Children of the Sun*, p. 104.

are reminiscences of real individuals, the first bringers of Egyptian culture to the area where the tales are told, and when people say that they were civilized by a man who came from the sky, we must read instead of "sky" whatever place Dr. Perry supposes that their culture came from. When a tribe claims that its culture is due to certain supernatural beings who, among other feats, told the sun to go down and give them rest, instead of staying up all the time, we are told that "the claim of 'the natives that certain beings originated their civilization is apparently trustworthy."¹ Yet why should their history be more trustworthy than their astronomy?

Believers in the historic myth are fond of telling us how easily such myths arise, but never produce any evidence to show that they have so arisen. Thus Mr. M. E. Lord assures us² that "a labyrinthine palace in 'which Athenian slaves were killed in a fight with the 'king's bulls would easily give rise to the story of the 'Athenian captives devoured by a monster half man 'and half bull.' For many centuries men have been killed every year in the bull-rings of Spain, yet their death has given rise to no such myth; this is not surprising, since nobody who had seen a bull could suppose that fighting bulls have human bodies. The early Greek vase-painters represent the Minotaur not as a man-devouring monster but as a helpless-looking creature being stabbed unresistingly—no doubt a sacrificial victim wearing a mask.

"Into the ten days' Battle of Dunheath," says Professor R. W. Chambers,³ "Norse poetry has probably 'compressed the century-long struggle of Goth and 'Hun. . . . For popular tradition will easily turn a 'desultory conflict into a single dramatic encounter, 'but hardly the reverse.' The wars of the Saxons with the Welsh and the Danes were desultory conflicts, but tradition has not turned them into a single dramatic

¹ Op. cit., pp. 123–4.

² *Classical Journal*, 1923–4, p. 269.

³ *Widsith*, p. 48.

encounter, and there seems no reason to believe that what Professor Chambers describes as easy is in fact possible.

If a process cannot actually be proved to occur, it is surely the duty of those who postulate it to give some reason for believing in its occurrence, yet the two examples which I have just quoted, in which scholars describe as "easy" processes the very possibility of which they have attempted neither to demonstrate nor explain, are unfortunately typical. It seems to be regarded as the privilege of a professor of classics or literature to guess the origin of a particular story, and then elevate his guess to the status of a universal rule. What is needed is a comparative study of history and myth, and this, so far as I have been able to carry it, seems to show clearly that the "historic myth" is a fiction.

The same applies to the "nature myth," the theory, that is to say, that myths are fanciful or speculative explanations of natural phenomena. According to Max Müller and his school, all myths are sun myths. "The siege of Troy is but a repetition of the siege of the "East by the solar powers that every evening are "robbed of their brightest treasures in the West."¹ Alternatively, it is a repetition of the contest between summer and winter, in which summer is defeated every autumn, but revives and becomes victorious every spring.

As a fact, however, there is no contest, either between night and day or between summer and winter, and it never occurs to us to imagine that there is. We say, "It is getting rather dark," and not "Day is giving "ground before the blows of Night," and when we feel the first frost it never occurs to us to suggest that the life-blood of summer is oozing away. The latter are the ideas of Court poetry, not of everyday life. Mr. Tiddy says that "the people naturally conceive of the "Old and New Year as combatants,"² but the very

¹ Max Müller, *The Science of Language*, vol. i, p. 515.

² R. J. E. Tiddy, *The Mummers' Play*, p. 108.

idea of a New Year is highly artificial. In nature the year has no beginning.

The sun-myth, in its earlier form, is now out of fashion, and has been replaced by a revised version in which myth is represented as "primitive science." The believers in this theory suppose that primitive man was consumed by a thirst for knowledge, and spent much of his time in speculating on the origin of the heavenly bodies, of the seasons, and of life and death. In default of a better explanation, he explained all these phenomena in terms of his own experience, and that is why in the myths the stars and the seasons are represented as human beings.

Thus Andrew Lang thought that "the origin of the 'world and of man is naturally a problem which has 'excited the curiosity of the least developed minds,'"¹ and Sir Laurence Gomme believed that "everywhere, "almost, man has stood apart for a moment and asked "himself the question, Whence am I?"²

Professor Halliday similarly supposes that "myths "represent the answers given by the human imagination to the problem of how things came to be. How "were Earth and Sky created or how did evil enter the "world?"³ and Professor H. J. Rose alleges that "in "the myth proper, imagination plays freely, poetically "also it may be, or grotesquely, upon some striking "phenomenon . . . or the nature and activities of a "superhuman being."⁴

Professor Rose's myth-maker must have been a very remarkable person. On the one hand, he could not have been an atheist, for then supernatural beings would have had no existence for him, and on the other hand he could not have been a believer, for then the freedom of his imagination must have been trammelled by the nature of his belief. This is no quibble; if a man believes in the supernatural, he must have some beliefs

¹ *Myth, Ritual, and Religion*, vol. i, p. 162.

² Op. cit., p. 130.

³ *Indo-European Folktales and Greek Legend*, p. 5.

⁴ *Folk-Lore*, vol. xlvi, p. 11.

about it, and if he has beliefs he cannot give free rein to his imagination. All men, both savage or civilized, are bound to accept, or possibly to reject, the beliefs of their day; to only the tiniest minority is it given to go even an inch beyond them. Half a dozen of the Greek philosophers might qualify as myth-makers under Professor Rose's definition, and in modern times perhaps Spinoza and Kant, but did the latter compose myths? Certainly not, and those philosophers who have speculated about the origin of evil have not, to my knowledge, produced a rival myth to that of Eve and the Serpent. All these theories are based upon the supposition that illiterate savages live in a state of highly intellectual agnosticism, in the luxuriant soil of which, owing to the lack of scientific cultivation, weeds monstrous or strangely beautiful are continually springing up.

This picture is an utterly false one. The savage is interested in nothing which does not impinge upon his senses, and never has a new idea even about the most familiar things. In this he is like our own illiterates. At the elementary schools some knowledge of more remote subjects is impressed upon them with the aid of books, but as soon as their school days are over the majority relapse into the mental state in which savages remain permanently. It has been held that the curiosity which is displayed in some degree by all human beings is evidence of ability to speculate;¹ is the interest which a herd of cattle displays in a strange dog evidence of ability to speculate? Professor Halliday's myth-makers are filled with curiosity about the origin of the universe and of evil in it, but such curiosity is not merely unknown among savages, it is extremely rare among the civilized. How many of us have tried seriously to understand the theory of relativity or the doctrine of the Atonement? I wonder whether Professor Halliday can explain why the grass is green, and whether Professor Rose has reflected imaginatively upon the causes of volcanic activity. Anyhow, the

¹ A. Lang, op. cit., vol. i, p. 87.

savage attempts nothing of the kind. In discussing the mythology of the Bantu, Dr. Lindblom¹ expresses surprise at "their great lack of feeling that the origin "of the most important phenomena of existence need "explanation." We may safely accept the fact from a most competent observer; his surprise is due to his failure to realize that it is a question not of feeling but of *thinking*. Thinking, in the sense in which we use the word when we say that a man is a "thinker," is a skilled occupation, requiring not merely a long apprenticeship but a highly specialized set of tools. Even the simplest speculation about cosmic origins or moral principles requires a vocabulary of abstract terms, and such terms are lacking in savage, and even in semi-civilized, languages. In our discussion of the simplest scientific or philosophical questions we use such terms as cause, effect, creation, origin, result, nature, reason, idea, image, theory, problem—terms which it is difficult to translate into Anglo-Saxon, and impossible to translate into any unwritten language. We can say with confidence that myths are not the result of speculation, firstly because they are never expressed in the only forms of language in which speculation is possible, and secondly because illiterates never speculate, and the speculations of literate communities lead not to mythology but to philosophy and science.

Professor Malinowski² quotes *Notes and Queries in Anthropology* as saying that "myths are stories which, "however marvellous and improbable to us, are nevertheless related in all good faith, because they are "intended, or believed by the teller, to explain by "means of something concrete and intelligible an "abstract idea or such vague and difficult conceptions "as Creation, Death . . .," and asks, "Would our "Melanesians agree with this opinion? Certainly not. "They do not want to 'explain,' to make 'intelligible,' "anything which happens in their myths—above all

¹ G. Lindblom, *The Akamba*, p. 252.

² In the *Frazer Lectures*, ed. W. R. Dawson, p. 81.

"an abstract idea. Of that there can be found to my knowledge no instance in Melanesia or in any other savage community. . . . Nor would a Trobriander agree with the view that 'Creation, Death . . .' are 'vague and difficult conceptions.' He could not possibly do so, since there is no word for 'to create,' or even 'to make,' in any Melanesian language.¹

In putting forward a view of myth very different from that which Professor Malinowski criticizes, I find myself in the unusual position of being able to quote in its support a number of distinguished writers, including Professor Malinowski himself. I shall begin with Professor Hooke, who defines myth as "the 'spoken part of a ritual; the story which the ritual 'enacts.'"²

"A *mythos* to the Greeks," says Miss Harrison,³ "was primarily just a thing spoken, uttered by the *mouth*. Its antithesis or rather correlative is the thing 'done, enacted. . . . The primary meaning of myth 'in religion is just the same as in early literature; it is 'the spoken correlative of the acted rite. . . . Its 'object is not at first to give a reason; that notion is 'part of the old rationalist fallacy which saw in primitive man the leisured and eager inquirer bent on 'research.'

"We shall probably not err," says Sir James Frazer, "in assuming that many myths, which we now know 'only as myths, had once their counterpart in magic; 'in other words, that they used to be acted as a means 'of producing in fact the events which they describe in 'figurative language. Ceremonies often die out while 'myths survive, and thus we are left to infer the dead 'ceremony from the living myth."⁴

Even Professor Rose, whose definition of myth we have criticized above, when dealing with the mythical

¹ A. M. Hocart, *Kingship*, p. 197.

² S. H. Hooke, *Myth and Ritual*, p. 3.

³ J. E. Harrison, *Themis*, p. 328.

⁴ Op. cit., vol. ix, p. 274. It must be admitted that Sir James elsewhere expresses views difficult to reconcile with this.

quarrel of Zeus and Hera and the Platæan rite which "commemorated" it, says that "the legend has pretty certainly grown out of the rite, as usually happens";¹ and Professor A. B. Cook² says that "behind the myth "[of the Minotaur], as is so often the case, we may "detect a ritual performance."

"And not only is the Myth the explanation of the "rite," says Professor Thomson,³ "it is at the same "time, in part at least, the explanation of the god. To "primitive minds it is a matter of such transcendent "importance to get the ritual exactly right (for the " slightest deviation from the rules will ruin everything) "that the worshippers will not proceed one step without "authority. And who is their authority? In "normal circumstances the oldest man in the tribe, the "worshipper who has been most frequently through "this particular ceremony before. And his authority? "Well, the oldest tribesman within his memory. And "so the tradition goes back and back. . . . But it "must end somewhere, and it ends, as a thousand "instances show, in an imaginary divine founder of the "rite, who becomes the centre of the Myth."

"We must always look for an explanation," says Professor Hocart,⁴ "not to the survival, but to the "living custom or belief. If we turn to the living myth, "that is the myth that is believed in, we find that it has "no existence apart from the ritual. The ritual is always derived from someone, and its validity must be "established by its derivation. The actors are merely "impersonating the supposed inventors of the ritual, "and this impersonation has to be expressed in words. "Knowledge of the myth is essential to the ritual, because it has to be recited at the ritual."

"Psychologists like Wundt," says Professor Malinowski,⁵ "sociologists like Durkheim, Hubert and

¹ Op. cit., p. 104.

² Op. cit., vol. i, p. 522.

³ J. A. K. Thomson, *Studies in the Odyssey*, p. 54.

⁴ A. M. Hocart, *The Progress of Man*, p. 223.

⁵ Op. cit., pp. 70, 72, 98.

"Mauss, anthropologists like Crawley, classical scholars like Miss Jane Harrison, have all understood the intimate association between myth and ritual, between sacred tradition and the norms of social structure. . . . Myth as it exists in a savage community, that is, in its living primitive form, is not merely a story told but a reality lived. It is not of the nature of fiction, such as we read to-day in a novel, but it is a living reality, believed to have once happened in primeval times, and continuing ever since to influence the world and human destinies. This myth is to the savage what, to a fully believing Christian, is the Biblical story of Creation, of the Fall, of the Redemption." Discussing myths of origin, he says, "We can certainly discard all explanatory as well as all symbolical ex-interpretations of these myths of origin. The personages and beings which we find in them are what they appear to be on the surface, and not symbols of hidden realities. As to any explanatory function of these myths, there is no problem which they cover, no curiosity which they satisfy, no theory which they contain."

The myth, then, has nothing to do with speculations or explanations, any more than it has with historical facts. Strictly speaking, it is nothing but the form of words which is associated with a rite. To give a simple example—when we part from a friend, we shake him by the hand and say "Good-bye." The handshake is the rite, and the expression "good-bye," which is a shortened form of "God be with you," is the myth. By calling upon God to be with our friend, we give strength and validity to the bond which the handshake sets up, and which will draw us together again. In this case, however, the myth has probably been truncated, as it has certainly been contracted. It has now no direct connection with the rite. If, however, when shaking hands on parting, we were in the habit of saying, "King Solomon, when he parted from the Queen of Sheba, shook her by the hand and said 'God be with you,'" we should give a sacramental character to

the rite by attributing its foundation to an ancient and sacred personage; this is what a myth normally does.

The purpose of ritual is to confer benefits on, or avert misfortunes from, those by whom or on whose behalf the ritual is performed, by means of actions and words which from a scientific point of view are entirely ineffective, except in so far as they produce a psychological effect upon the participants themselves. This is, of course, not the view of the ritualists, who usually judge the efficacy of the ritual not by its effect upon themselves, but by its supposed effect upon the forces of nature. Many Africans believe that rain will not fall unless there has been a proper rain-making ceremony; if the rain follows the ceremony, then it is clear that the ceremony has been properly performed, and if rain does not follow, it is equally clear that the ceremony has not been properly performed. Where the ritual can be so easily judged by its apparent results there is no need of a myth.

Usually, however, the supposed effects of the ritual are far less clearly apparent, so that, if belief in its efficacy is to be maintained, a more complex type of faith is required. This is induced by the myth, which not merely links the ritual of the present with the ritual of the past, but actually identifies the present, in its ritual aspect, with a past conceived solely in terms of ritual—a past, that is to say, in which superhuman figures devote themselves to the performance of acts which are the prototypes of the ritual. The stories of their activities, the myths, then perform the dual function of sanctifying and of standardizing the ritual. This standardization of myth is never complete, however, before the introduction of writing, when those myths which are closely associated with rites become scriptures; other myths become “folk-lore,” as I shall now try to show.

CHAPTER XII

THE FOLK-TALE

CERTAIN folklorists have divided, or attempted to divide, the traditional prose narrative into three completely distinct classes: the myth, the saga, and the folk-tale or märchen. We saw in the last chapter that the myth is a narrative linked with ritual, and in Chapter V that a saga, although it may sometimes include matter drawn from chronicles or from contemporary history, is a form of novel based chiefly upon myth. Let us now see what the folk-tale really is.

Spence, in his definition of a folk-tale, says that it may be of mythical origin,¹ and Andrew Lang, in the course of a few pages, describes the story of a Jason as a myth, a legend, and a saga, and refers to its parallels as fairy-tales and as popular tales,² but other writers, as I said just now, have attempted to draw a hard-and-fast line between the folk-tale or märchen and other types of traditional narrative, and have supposed that the former is a type of fiction, composed by and for the folk, that is to say the illiterate.

Thus MacCulloch says that all over the world simple stories were invented, and that "as time went on, and "man's inventive and imaginative faculties developed, "these simple stories . . . became incidents in longer "tales. New episodes were invented; the growth of "custom and belief would furnish ever new material."³

Hartland tells us that in the märchen or fairy-tale "the reins are thrown upon the neck of the imagination," and of uncivilized man that "his imagination "predominates over his reason and his hypotheses "about the origin of things take the shape of tales

¹ L. Spence, *An Introduction to Mythology*, p. 12.

² *Custom and Myth*, pp. 94, 99.

³ J. A. MacCulloch, *The Childhood of Fiction*, p. 457.

"originating in unbounded draughts upon his own emotions."¹

Krappe assures us that "it is certainly excusable to 'take the common-sense view and to regard the fairy-tale as a definite type of popular fiction, primarily 'designed to please and to entertain,'"² and Professor H. J. Rose defines a *märchen* as "primitive fiction told 'merely to amuse or interest the audience and without 'ulterior purpose. It follows certain well-worn lines, 'as popular imagination is very limited."

These views are, I think, demonstrably incorrect. The facts are:—

(1) No popular story-teller has ever been known to invent anything.

(2) Not only are the incidents in folk-tales the same all over the world, but in areas of the same language they are commonly narrated in the same actual words.

(3) Folk-tales deal as a rule with subjects of which the folk can have no knowledge.

(4) The exercise of the imagination consists not in creating something out of nothing, but in the transmutation of matter already present in the mind.

I shall deal with these seriatim, and shall begin by quoting Hartland against himself. He expatiates upon the imagination of uncivilized man, but is, nevertheless, at pains to show that the popular story-teller never displays any imagination whatever. He tells us that "the dislike of voluntary change forbids amendment of formulae which have long ceased to be understood. . . . It is by no means an uncommon thing for the rustic story-teller to be unable to explain . . . episodes in any other way than Uncle Remus—‘She wuz in de tale, en de tale I give you like hit were gun to me.’" He cites Dr. Steere as saying that the

¹ E. S. Hartland, *The Science of Fairy Tales*, pp. 23, 33.

² A. H. Krappe, *The Science of Folklore*, p. 11.

Swahili story-tellers scarcely understood the sung parts of their tales, and Dr. Rink as saying of the Eskimo that "the art requires the ancient tales to be "related as nearly as possible in the words of the "original version." He also tells us that "in these "[Campbell's] tales words were often used which had "dropped out of ordinary parlance, giving proof of "careful adherence to the ancient forms." . . . "To "sum up," he concludes, "it would appear that "national differences in the manner of story-telling are "for the most part superficial. Whether told by men "to men in the bazaar or coffee-house of the East, or by "old men or women to children in the sacred recesses "of the European home, or by men to a mixed as- "sembly during the endless nights of the Arctic Circle, "or in the huts of the tropical forest, and notwith- "standing the license often taken by the professional "reciter, the endeavour to render to the audience just "what the speaker has himself received from his "predecessors is paramount."¹

"As a rule," says Professor Halliday,² "the pride of "the professional is rather in the preservation of the "old tale; both he and his hearers put a high premium "on conservatism." According to Sir John Rhys, the Welsh story-tellers were not inventors but merely editors, and their stories echoes of ancient myths,³ and we are told that the Irish story-teller "never chose his "own words—he always had the story by heart, and "recited the words from memory."⁴

The rustic or savage story-teller may seem to be improvising his stories, just as to one who visits a theatre for the first time the funny man may seem to be improvising his jokes. Investigation, however, shows that in illiterate communities the people as a whole not merely do not invent stories, but they do not even tell stories. The telling of stories may only be done by

¹ Op. cit., pp. 6, 18-21.

² Op. cit., p. 23.

³ *Studies in the Arthurian Legend*, p. 175.

⁴ P. W. Joyce, *Old Celtic Romances*, p. ix.

recognized story-tellers, and not only is it incumbent on these to tell the stories in the traditional manner and with the traditional words, but among many tribes they may tell only the particular stories which they have a recognized right to tell.

These being the facts, we are faced with two possible explanations. We must conclude either that savages once possessed a faculty of imagination and invention which has unaccountably disappeared, or that the attribution of imagination and inventiveness to savages is erroneous.

We now come to the second point, which is that the same tales are told in many parts of the world. Professor Rose explains this, as we saw, by the limitations of the popular imagination, but while this might conceivably explain the similarity in the incidents, it cannot possibly explain the similarity in the wording and the names. We find, for example, that the fairy-tales of England and France contain not merely the same incidents, but the same or equivalent names. How does Professor Rose account for this? Does he really believe that an English rustic, trying to think of a name for a man who murders his wives, is restricted by his imagination to "Bluebeard," and that a French rustic is similarly restricted to "Barbe-bleu"? Or that an Englishman and a Frenchman, devising a name for a girl who meets a wolf, have no possible alternatives to "Little Red Riding Hood" and "Le Petit Chaperon Rouge"? Unless we form so extravagant an hypothesis, we must conclude that one set of tales is a translation. The argument could be carried much farther, but the above seems enough to show that the fairy-tales of one country are not of popular origin, and this being so, we have no reason to assume that the fairy-tales of another country are of popular origin.

Like the fairy-tale, the folk-play is alleged to be of popular origin. The fact that all over England and a great part of Europe the incidents of the folk-play are very similar might again be accounted for by the

limitations of the popular imagination, but what are we to say when we find the couplet—

“Here comes I, old Beelzebub
“Over my shoulder I carry my club,”

with trifling variations in the folk-plays of Lincolnshire, Gloucestershire, Sussex, Cornwall, and other English counties, and of Belfast?¹ Are we to suppose that these words spring inevitably to the lips of a rustic playwright?

It should be quite clear that to say that a story, song, or play is of popular origin means nothing unless we assume that it actually originated with the people among whom it is now found, or their ancestors. If we find reason to believe that a folk-story has been borrowed, even from the next village, its popular origin becomes suspect, since if one community borrows instead of inventing, another may well do the same, and if one item of what passes as folk-lore is borrowed, it is at least possible that all is borrowed.

It is, of course, difficult to prove that no folk-tales are of popular origin, but a study not merely of the wording and names, but of the incidents in detail, may be sufficient to show that their popular origin is at least highly improbable. It is often alleged, for example, that the Celtic peasantry are highly imaginative people, and that their imagination expresses itself in fairy-tales, but a detailed comparison of the fairy-tales of Brittany with those of Italy led Coote to the conclusion that none of the Breton tales could be of Celtic origin.²

Let us take a story which is found all over the world, the details of which, though they cannot of course prove that it has been diffused from a common source, at any rate strongly suggest it. The story has been discussed by Andrew Lang³ and by Professor Saintyves,⁴

¹ R. J. E. Tiddy, op. cit.

² H. C. Coote, in *Folk-Lore*, vol. i, p. 212.

³ *Custom and Myth*, pp. 87 seq.

⁴ *Les Contes de Perrault* p. 272.

and in its simplest form goes as follows : A youth somehow finds his way to the house of a giant or ogre, who lives in a remote part of the world or in the sky. The ogre has a beautiful daughter, and she and the youth fall in love. The ogre finds the youth, and sets him a succession of impossible tasks, such as emptying a large lake with a bucket or cleaning an Augean stable, but the ogre's daughter has magic at her disposal, by means of which the youth is enabled to perform the tasks, to the ogre's intense annoyance. The youth and the girl then decide to elope; the ogre pursues them, but he is delayed by magic obstacles which the girl places in his path until a river is reached which allows the lovers to cross, but drowns the ogre.

"The Greeks have the tale," Lang tells us, "the people of Madagascar have it, the Lowland Scotch, "the Celts, the Russians, the Italians, the Algonquins, "the Finns, and the Samoans have it . . . while many "scattered incidents occur in even more widely severed "races, such as Zulus, Bushmen, Japanese, Eskimo, "Samoyeds." Other versions have come to light since he wrote, and, as he points out,¹ it is not merely the main features that are the same in the most remote parts of the world, but even the details. In many of the versions, for example, the girl throws her comb to the ground, whereupon it turns into a forest or thicket, which delays the ogre's pursuit. We may conclude with Dr. Krappe² that "it is unthinkable that a tale with a "plot as complicated . . . should have arisen in- "dependently."

There are other tales with a plot as complicated and a distribution as wide as that just cited. Lang discusses another of them, that of which the story of Jason is the type; "we must suppose," he says,³ "either that all "wits jumped and invented the same romantic series of "situations by accident, or that all men spread from "one centre, where the story was known, or that the "story, once invented, has drifted all round the world."

¹ Op. cit., p. 92.

² Op. cit., p. 8.

³ Op. cit., p. 101.

He inclined, as might be expected, to the last explanation, and we must again insist that if one story which a savage tells is derived from an alien source, it is possible, and even probable, that the other stories which he tells have a similar origin.

Having shown that the manner in which folk-tales are told, and the manner in which they are distributed, renders it at least highly improbable that they are of popular origin, we have next to consider their matter. If folk-tales were really composed by the folk, we should expect them to deal with subjects with which the folk are familiar—matters of village courtship and marriage, of quarrels and revenges, of seed-time and harvest, of plenty and dearth, of hunting and fishing—in short, of such materials as were used by Mary Webb in *Precious Bane*, or Pearl Buck in *The Good Earth*—but we should be disappointed. These stories are novels written by and for highly sophisticated people, and the material of folk-tales is of a very different character. It is very seldom that peasants appear in the tales at all. The *dramatis personae*, when they are not supernatural beings, are kings, queens, princes, and princesses, or other potentates, with their ministers and attendants. The scenes are laid, not in the farmyard or the harvest field, but in palaces, castles, and courts; the plots are concerned not with rural life, but with heroic feats of arms and the succession to kingdoms; and the accessories consist largely of magic jewels, helmets of invisibility, and other objects quite outside the range of a peasant's ideas.

Even when the characters are supposed to be peasants, the situations and incidents are quite unreal. Take, for example, the story of Red Riding Hood: bed-ridden old women do not really live alone in the heart of wolf-haunted forests; wolves cannot really gobble people up without leaving a trace, and girls do not really mistake wolves, however conversational, for their grandparents. The story was obviously composed neither by nor for people who really lived in danger of wolves, and the father is represented as a wood-cutter

merely in order that he may be at hand with a weapon at the proper moment.

In many stories in which the hero ends by ascending the throne and reigning as if to the manner born, he is represented as starting life as a pauper, but this is done, as I shall try to show later, to explain the fact that, in the typical myth, the hero has to pass through a period of adversity. It is usually found that, though ostensibly the son of a peasant, he is really a prince who in early infancy was either stolen by an enemy or hidden from a tyrant by his friends.

It seems to be supposed, though I have nowhere seen this clearly stated, that the peasant and the savage, although they are great hands at making up stories, are nevertheless incapable of making up the simplest story of the doings of ordinary human beings, and are therefore obliged to have recourse to ogres, fairies, talking animals, and people endowed with supernatural powers, to which conceptions they are led by some mysterious but universal force. It has been suggested that this force operates by means of dreams and hallucinations, but those who make this suggestion fail to realize that dreams and hallucinations cannot put new ideas into the mind.

This brings me to my next point, that concerning the widespread superstition that the imagination is capable of making something out of nothing, or, in other words, that there can come out of a man's mind ideas, whether of fact or fiction, which bear no relation to anything that has gone into it. Most theories of the origin of folklore, though they do not state this definitely, nevertheless imply that savages and rustics possess such powers of the imagination as in reality the most brilliant literary genius has never possessed.

An architect cannot design a new type of house unless he has in his mind or on his desk recollections or records of a large number of existing houses, unless he understands thoroughly the purpose of the different parts of a house, and the means of making access from one to another, and unless he has a thorough know-

ledge of the materials out of which houses are constructed, and of the means employed for putting them together. In exactly the same way, nobody can hope to be a successful poet or composer of stories unless he has familiarized himself with a large number of poems or stories of different types, both in their general outlines and in the details of their construction; and the better the writers whose works he studies, the better are his own writings likely to be. This simple fact is, of course, the basis of all literary education. In addition, our budding author must, if he is to produce anything possessing the least degree of originality, observe and read a good deal, and thus acquire a large fund of ideas. By drawing upon these he will be able to vary the form and content of his writings; this is the most that he will be able to do, since imagination at its highest is no more than the combination of two or more old ideas to form a new idea. The "wild fancy" of the savage, of which we hear so much, could rise to no greater heights than that of imagining an orgy of meat and beer lasting two or three days instead of one, and to suppose the unlettered rustic capable of composing the story of Cinderella is as absurd as to suppose him capable of designing the palace in which she left her slipper.

The belief that folk-tales are the product of "popular" "imagination" is due to a confused use of the word "imagination." Anyone who has seen elephants, or pictures of elephants, can "imagine" an elephant, that is to say that he can form a mental picture of an elephant, which will be more or less accurate according as his memory is more or less retentive, but which will add nothing to his or anyone else's ideas on the subject of elephants, or on any other subject. Compare with this the picture of a pterodactyl as imagined by a scientist. Out of some bones and other fossil remains, together with a wide knowledge of the appearance and anatomy of birds and of reptiles, he "imagines" a picture of a pterodactyl which definitely adds to the stock of human ideas. Imagination of the first type

could not invent a folk-tale, since it can invent nothing, and even the second type, the infinitely rarer creative imagination, could invent a folk-tale only if the elements out of which it was to be composed were present in its possessor's mind.

In his masterly work, *The Road to Xanadu*, Professor Lowes has taken a portion of Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* and has traced every idea, and almost every phrase, in it to something that Coleridge can be shown to have read. Professor Lowes says that the poem is a work of pure imagination, but that "a work of pure 'imagination is not something fabricated by a *tour de force* from nothing, and suspended, without anchor-age in fact, in the impalpable ether of a visionary 'world. No conception could run more sharply 'counter to the truth."¹ He later speaks of "a strange "but widely prevalent idea" that "the shaping spirit of "imagination sits aloof, like God as He is commonly "conceived, creating in some thaumaturgic fashion out "of nothing its visionary world. That and that only is "deemed to be 'originality'—that, and not the imperial "moulding of old matter into imperishably new "forms."²

It is very few writers, however, who have even devised new forms; literary conventions are universal, especially poetic conventions. These conventions apply just as strictly to ballads and other forms of what are known as "folk-poetry" as they do to literary products. When, for example, Countess Cesaresco describes how "a herdsman or tiller of the soil strings "together a few verses embodying some simple thought "which came into his head whilst he looked at the green "fields or the blue skies," and how "one or two friends "get them by heart,"³ she forgets not only that such a process has never actually been known to occur, but that bucolic poetry is perhaps the most sophisticated

¹ *The Road to Xanadu*, p. 241.

² Op. cit., p. 428.

³ Countess Martinengo-Cesaresco, *The Study of Folk-Songs*, p. 59.

form of poetry, and that its successful composers, from Theocritus to Wordsworth, have been men of the highest education.

Even so great a poet as Theocritus is less original than is commonly supposed. Speaking of his *Festival of Adonis*, perhaps the most admired of his idylls, Dr. Tyrrell says that he himself had always regarded it as a triumphantly successful piece of character-painting. "But I own," he continues, "that I was grieved to find "what seems to me clear evidence that such scenes, in "which women inveigh against their absent spouses, "were part of the stock in trade of the mimographer, "and were constantly reproduced. So also the reviling "of servants by their mistresses, which also appears in "this idyll. I am sure that Theocritus has handled these "scenes with an art altogether transcending that of his "rivals, but I had thought that they were the fruits of "his own genius and invention."¹ Far from ploughing a lonely furrow, Theocritus was, in fact, rather the winner of a ploughing competition, and if the greatness of a great poet consists merely in improving upon the efforts of his predecessors or rivals, how can it be supposed that an unlettered rustic could invent themes and metres for himself?

Hundreds of English poets have dealt on conventional lines with mountains, primroses, and love's young dream, and the range of non-European poets is even more limited. "Everybody knows," says Bain,² "that classical Sanscrit authors have no originality. "They do but rhetorically reset and embellish notorious themes; such originality as they possess lying "not in their subject but in its treatment." In China, so Mr. Waley tells us, "innumerable poems record 'Reflections on visiting a ruin,' or on the 'Site of an old city.' The details are ingeniously varied, but the "sentiments are in each case identical." Innumerable Arabic poems are supposed to be written on the

¹ *The Idylls of Theocritus*, tr. Calverley, ed. R. Y. Tyrrell, p. xvi.

² F. W. Bain, *A Digit of the Moon*, p. x.

deserted camp site of the loved one's tribe; at first the hearer is apt to take for an expression of genuine emotion what he later learns to recognize as an exhibition of virtuosity.

It is the same with stories; every literary community has certain types of story outside which none but exceptional geniuses can venture. As for the folk, they may make minor alterations, mostly for the worse, in existing poems, stories, or plays, but they never compose them for themselves.

This fact, like negatives in general, is difficult to prove. We may note that though the French Canadians have been in Canada for over three centuries, the songs that they sing are those which they brought from France. The editors of a collection of these songs "sought in vain for evidences of song-creation among 'the Canadian population.'¹" There seems to be nothing in the *Uncle Remus* stories, except the language, which the negroes did not bring from Africa. The English folk-play, which I discussed a few pages back, is not merely much the same, both in incidents and in language, all over the country, but some versions embody long quotations from the works of Congreve and Addison.² This is a striking illustration of the fact that the literature of the folk is not their own production, but comes down to them from above.

¹ *Folk-Lore*, vol. xxxvii, p. 102.

² R. J. E. Tiddy, op. cit., pp. 82, 85.

CHAPTER XIII

MYTH AND RITUAL

THE position which we have now reached is that the folk-tale is never of popular origin, but is merely one form of the traditional narrative; that the traditional narrative has no basis either in history or in philosophical speculation, but is derived from the myth; and that the myth is a narrative connected with a rite.

The theory that all traditional narratives are myths, that is to say, that they are connected with ritual, may be maintained upon five grounds:—

- (1) That there is no other satisfactory way in which they can be explained. As the whole of this book is intended to establish this proposition, I shall not refer to it in particular here.
- (2) That these narratives are concerned primarily and chiefly with supernatural beings, kings, and heroes.
- (3) That miracles play a large part in them.
- (4) That the same scenes and incidents appear in many parts of the world.
- (5) That many of these scenes and incidents are explicable in terms of known rituals.

It was once supposed that the idea of a god or of gods was innate, but thinking persons have realized, since the days of Locke, that there are no innate ideas. The idea that it is natural to believe in the supernatural has only to be so stated to show its absurdity. Apart from innate ideas, we have inspiration and revelation, but even if all the claims made for these were admitted, they would still fail to provide an explanation for at least three-quarters of the phenomena connected with the belief in supernatural beings. Nobody, so far as I know, has claimed that the quarrels of the gods in the *Iliad* were divinely revealed to Homer.

Passing over the kings and heroes for a moment, we come to the miraculous elements in our narratives. It may be said that miracles never happen, but that does not explain the important fact, which is that they are believed to happen. Further than that, an occurrence is never considered miraculous unless it is believed to be due to the action either of a supernatural being or of a human being endowed with supernatural power, and unless it is believed to have a significant effect upon the fortunes of human beings. An earthquake is in itself not a miracle; it becomes a miracle when it destroys the ungodly, or when the godly have a narrow escape. In religious literature it is used interchangeably with the word "sign," and we often hear of "signs and wonders." Now a sign is essentially a preparatory act, a minor wonder performed as a preliminary to a major wonder. In my view, this sign is the ritual act. It seems to me, that is to say, that when an African rain-maker pours beer upon the sacred rain-stones with the appropriate ceremonies, he is making a sign or signal to the rain to fall.

We find here all the characteristics of a miracle; firstly, it is performed by a person believed to be endowed with super-human power; secondly, the end proposed is recognized as a proper one for super-human action; and, thirdly, the ritual is the recognized means of bringing about such action.

When we use the expression "to perform a miracle," we normally confuse the action of the miracle-worker with the supposed result of that action. We are apt to think of the miracle-worker as performing some quite impossible action, such as turning a person into a pig. If we study the narratives, however, we shall see that what he really does is some quite simple action. The conjurer, the sham miracle-worker, pretends to perform his feats by waving a wand and saying, "Hey, presto!" but this is all that the real miracle-worker, the ritualist, does, as a study of the stories will show. The miracle takes place not as a direct result of the miracle-worker's act, but as the result of a ceremony

in which the miracle-worker's act is the culminating rite.

If we take the story of Cinderella and examine its miracles, we find exactly the same features present as in the rain-making rite mentioned above. In the first place the miracle-worker is a being endowed with supernatural power, the fairy godmother; secondly, the object, that is, the provision of suitable equipment for one who is herself to be a queen, a person endowed with supernatural power, is a proper object for supernatural intervention; thirdly, the fairy godmother is not supposed to be able to make something out of nothing, but must go through the proper ritual. What the beer and the sacred stones are to the rain-maker, the magic wand and the pumpkin are to her. She is, in fact, a ritual personage using ritual objects to perform ritual acts. In the same way we find that the hero, whether of myth, saga, or fairy-tale, cannot injure the monster without the magic weapons; and that nobody else can use the magic weapons to injure the monster. Against the hero with the magic weapons the monster is powerless; he falls at the first blow. That is because the hero is a ritual personage using ritual weapons to deliver a ritual blow. The machinery of the traditional miracle, far from suggesting that it is either the product of an unfettered imagination or the embellished version of an historical incident, bears witness to its ritual origin.

It is not merely myths and fairy-tales which contain these reminiscences of ritual, but the sagas, romances, and even novels which are based upon them, not to mention their verse forms, the epic, the ballad, and even the nursery rhyme. It is proper to use these terms as long as they are understood to refer to the form of the stories, and not their contents, but if people claim, as certain folklorists do, that they can tell from the form of a story whether it originated in fact, fiction, or philosophical speculation, then they have left the realm of science, if they ever were in it, for that of prejudice.

The manner in which traditional stories are trans-

formed in romance is well described by Professor Kittredge, who shows how "supernatural creatures of "the most various kinds exchange rôles with be- "wilderling nonchalance, or are reduced to the status "of robbers, knights, ladies, or other classes of ordinary "mortals. The other World may appear as an island, "or a castle, or a cave, or an orchard, or a fair meadow, "or even the Christian hell."¹ He later tells us that the substitution of enchanted for supernatural beings is due to rationalization; "it brings the supernatural "personages down to the level of humanity, and makes "them thoroughly reasonable and natural creatures. . . . "The process, then, is of the same kind as that by which "gods became heroes, or by which animal spouses "became, not real animals, but men transformed for "the time into brute shape. As time goes on, however, "the very idea of enchantment may itself come to seem "unreasonable, and therefore an attempt is sometimes "made by the story-teller to represent the strange "events as due to natural causes, or to tell them as facts, "with no mention of the superhuman. This kind of "rationalizing is extremely common in Arthurian "romance, and it frequently results in contradiction "or sheer incomprehensibility."² The same may be said for the rationalizing of our Euhemerists.

Professor Gruffydd, dealing with the story of Lleu or Llew, says that the four stages, through which it has grown to its present form in the *mabinogi*, can be set down as follows:—

First stage.—Mythology . . . —of Lugh-Lleu as a god we have considerable evidence.

Second stage.—Mythology becomes history.

Third stage.—Mythological history becomes folk-lore.

Fourth stage.—Folk-lore is utilized to form literary tales.³

¹ G. L. Kittredge, *Gawaine and the Green Knight*, p. 77.

² *Ibid.*, p. 239.

³ W. J. Gruffydd, *Math vab Mathonwy*, p. 81; the examples which he cites are very interesting, but too long to quote.

It is pretty certain that every old story has passed through a series of vicissitudes, and it is clearly impossible to reconstruct the original form by the aid of taste alone. We can, however, say with some confidence that where we have two or more versions of the same story, the older is likely to be nearer to the mythical, that is the ritual, type. This applies not merely to stories, but also to folk-songs and folk-customs. Dr. C. B. Lewis, after making a study of the nursery rhyme, "Where are you going to, my pretty maid?" and then of the folk-customs connected with May Day, summarizes the question as follows:—

"The conclusion, then, is the same as the one we reached with regard to our nursery rhyme: the folk 'has neither part nor lot in the making of folklore.' The source of our folksong and folk customs is 'religion: on the one hand Christian religion; on the other pagan. At what date in history these elements of religion turned, the one into folksong, the other into folklore, it is difficult to affirm, and indeed it is a different date in each case; but one may perhaps venture to say that it was then the religious origin of the themes in question was finally forgotten. 'From that moment on, the theme of our song and the details of our customs changed more rapidly than before, were even simplified or whittled down by this or that trait falling into oblivion, until they now appear as pearls of such pure loveliness that only the folk, it is thought, in a far-distant past could have conceived them. Thus folklore and folksong, at least in the cases we have considered, turn out to be the last stage of all in an age-long evolution, and not 'by any means the first beginnings.'¹

This age-long evolution probably began, like most of the earlier elements of our culture, in the valleys of the Nile, the Euphrates, or the Indus. Dr. Lewis traces the songs and customs with which he deals back to South-Western Asia, the culture of which was largely influenced by that of the great agricultural civilizations.

¹ *Folk-Lore*, vol. xlvi, p. 74.

In these countries the livelihood of the people depended upon the river flood, and we have good reason to believe that from very early times they were ruled, or perhaps rather reigned over, by kings whose principal duty it was to ensure by means of ritual that the floods should be punctual and adequate. The flood myths probably originated as descriptions of this ritual. But the functions of the kings were by no means limited to the production of floods; they had also to ensure the fertility of women and animals, success in war, hunting and fishing, freedom from disease—in fact the general prosperity of the community. This duty they discharged by means of a complex ritual, in which they pretended to destroy the old world and create a new one; the descriptions of this ritual are the creation myths, in which the flood myths are included.¹ It is obvious that the kings could not be uniformly successful, and that people would remember years in which the crops or the hunting had been better than last year or the year before. Even among ourselves vague memories of certain facts combined with misconceptions of others readily coalesce into a belief in "good old days," in which things in general were much better than they are now. Such "good old days" among ourselves are often associated with "Good 'Queen Bess'" or "Good King Charles," but in a community without records that very small modicum of fact which among most English people passes for the history of these monarchs would be completely lost, and the Golden Age might be believed to be much more recent and much more golden.

And what do we mean when we say that Charles was a good king? We certainly do not mean that he was a good man; a good king is one whose subjects prosper, whether he is himself virtuous and kindly or not. This applies much more fully in the case of a king whose duties are purely ritual. Just as the good rain-maker is the one who induces good rain, so the good

¹ For these see A. M. Hocart, *Kingship*, ch. xvi, and my *Jocasta's Crime*, pp. 141 seq.

king is the king who induces good crops, good hunting, and so on. The ideal is one, not of supreme moral perfection, but of supreme functional efficiency. Vague memories of especially good kings may lead to the belief in the supremely good king. This king becomes the originator of the ritual, but not in an historical sense, because, it must be repeated, the idea of history is meaningless to the ritualist. History is what happens once, but things that happen once only are nothing to the ritualist, who is concerned only with things that are done again and again. Myth is ritual projected back into the past, not an historical past of time, but a ritual past of eternity. It is a description of what should be done by a king (priest, chief, or magician) in order to secure and maintain the prosperity of his people, told in the form of a narrative of what a hero, that is, an ideal king, etc., once did. And not only a hero, but a heroine, for in ritual the queen is as important, or nearly as important, as the king, and a queen can ensure prosperity and also victory, though she may never go near a battle. Myths are concerned almost entirely with gods and heroes, or goddesses and heroines, because they are accounts of royal ritual.

It may be urged that if all myths are derived from the royal ritual of the Nile-Indus region, then all myths should be alike. In fact, many myths are extremely widespread; this fact has been generally realized, except by exponents of the "Aryan" theory, but has been attributed to the alleged similar working of the human mind. This theory breaks down, however, when it is realized that however widespread certain features of myth and ritual may be, other myths and rites have a distribution comparable, let us say, to that of the Moslem religion. Nobody asserts that, because we find in Java and in Nigeria men who marry four wives and pray five times a day, the human mind works naturally in the direction of four wives and five daily prayers. No belief or practice can be claimed as natural unless it is universal, and even the most widespread myths and rites are not that.

The myth varies with the ritual, and both, especially among the illiterate, tend to reflect political and economic conditions. A ritual developed among a people who both kept cattle and cultivated the soil might spread on the one hand to pastoral nomads, and on the other to cultivators who kept no cattle. One part of the ritual would then die out, and as it would, of course, not be the same part, it might come to be supposed that the two rituals were quite independent. The beliefs that the sun drives in a chariot and that the moon sails in a boat are both derived from ritual, and tend to die out among people who have no chariots or no boats, though they usually leave traces.

But the political environment is, perhaps, more important than the economic in the development or retention of myth and ritual. The original ritual, so far as can be judged from the general pattern, was based on the existence of a king who was killed and replaced annually. A hundred myths describe his death and the installation of his successor. Such a system suggests a centralized kingdom with not more than a trinity of gods, gods who represent the old king, the new king, and the queen. Extended polytheism might be due to the rise of empires, in which the god of the capital reigns over the gods of the other cities, or to the existence of loose confederations, such as that of Greece, in which Zeus is supposed to reign rather uncertainly over a large number of other deities, just as Agamemnon is supposed to reign rather uncertainly over a large number of other kings and chiefs.

Thus myth and ritual, though probably derived, like logarithms, from a common source, are, so long as they are alive, and especially so long as they remain unwritten, continually subject to changes induced by local conditions. That they have remained in general so similar is evidence, not of the similar working of the human mind, but of that inertia which is in general its most salient characteristic.

CHAPTER XIV

MYTH AND RITUAL (*Continued*)

THE theory put forward in the last chapter is part of the general theory of the diffusion of culture, over which there has been so much discussion. The protagonists have been on the one hand those who refuse to admit the possibility of diffusion, except where, as in the case of the diffusion of the Christian religion, it cannot be denied, and on the other those who have maintained that all culture was diffused in the same manner, and from the same centre.

"It would be wrong," says Sir E. A. Wallis Budge,¹ "to say that the Egyptians borrowed from the Sumerians or the Sumerians from the Egyptians, but it may be submitted that the litterati of both peoples borrowed their theological systems from some common 'but exceedingly ancient source.'" He has told us that "the similarity between the two Companies of 'gods is too close to be accidental,'" but we are bound to agree with him that the present state of our knowledge does not enable us to point to any one definite source. That there are many more similarities in the religious systems of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Palestine, especially in connection with the divine kingship, has been shown by Professor Hooke and his colleagues in *Myth and Ritual* and *The Labyrinth*, in which a dozen learned writers show that the religious systems of those countries "possessed certain fundamental characteristics in common. They were essentially 'ritual religions aiming at securing the well-being of 'the community by the due performance of ritual 'actions. Each of these religions had certain rituals of 'central importance, and in each the central figure was 'the king, in whose person the fortune of the state was,

¹ *From Fetish to God in Ancient Egypt*, p. 155.

"so to speak, incarnate. In each religion these rituals "presented the same general pattern.

"This pattern consisted of a dramatic ritual representing the death and resurrection of the king, who was also the god, performed by priests and members of the royal family. It comprised a sacred combat, in which was enacted the victory of the god over his enemies, a triumphal procession in which the neighbouring gods took part, an enthronement, a ceremony by which the destinies of the state for the coming year were determined, and a sacred marriage.

"Together with the ritual and as an essential part of it there was always found, in some form or other, the recitation of the story whose outlines were enacted in the ritual. This was the myth, and its repetition had equal potency with the performance of the ritual. "In the beginning the thing said and the thing done were inseparably united, although in the course of time they were divorced and gave rise to widely differing literary, artistic, and religious forms."¹

I have quoted this passage here in order again to emphasize the close connection which exists between myth and ritual, and I shall now attempt to show that the myths of other countries, especially of Greece, are inexplicable except in terms of ritual, that many of them are actual descriptions of such a ritual as Professor Hooke describes, and that the accounts of the heroes are really accounts of the rites which the divine king had to perform. But whereas the existing accounts of the ritual of Egypt and Mesopotamia provide only for a pretence of killing the king, the traditions of Greece and less civilized countries point to a ritual in which the king was actually killed, either annually, at the end of some longer term, or when his strength fails, as in some parts of the world he still is.²

While the separation of Greek myth from Greek ritual may be due in part to the ancient philosophers,

¹ S. H. Hooke in *The Labyrinth*, p. v.

² J. G. Frazer, op. cit., vol. iv, pp. 104, etc.; C. G. Seligman, *Egypt and Negro Africa*, pp. 21 seq.

who composed allegories which, although in myth form, had no connection with ritual, it is due chiefly to modern classical scholars, who have failed to realize the close connection between Greek poetry and Greek religion, and to note that the Greek descriptive writers, such as Herodotus and Pausanias, never cite a myth except with reference to some rite or some sacred site. The completely fallacious ideas of myth which scholars derived from their purely literary studies of Homer have been extended over the world; scholars naturally "approached the myths of Egypt, Babylonia, and India "in the spirit they had imbibed from their classical "studies. They picked out the myths from the texts "in which they were embedded, arranged them into "neat systems of mythology after the fashion of "Hellenistic mythologists, and threw the rest of the "texts on the rubbish heap."¹

Leaving them to be rescued by other hands, I shall now examine some of the myths of Greece, and shall begin with perhaps the best known, that of Helen.

The story of Helen is as follows: she is the daughter of Zeus and Leda, or of Oceanus and Tethya, or of Tyndareus, or of Nemesis. She is the sister of Castor and Polydeuces, the Heavenly Twins, and is hatched from a swan's egg. She is born in various places. As a girl she is carried off by Theseus, but is rescued by her brothers while Theseus is on a visit to the Under-world. On her return to Sparta she is wooed by all the great chiefs of Greece, and chooses Menelaus, in favour of whom her father or stepfather Tyndareus resigns his throne. By Menelaus she has a daughter, Hermione, who is old enough to be betrothed before the Trojan war. Helen elopes with Paris, and goes with him to Troy, though in some accounts it is only her phantom which goes to Troy, while she herself remains in Egypt. After the ten years' siege and the death of Paris, she marries Deiphobus, who is killed by Menelaus. After many adventures she returns with Menelaus to Sparta, where they reign splendidly and

¹ A. M. Hocart in *The Labyrinth*, p. 264.

uneventfully. Of her end there are various accounts. In one version she and Menelaus are transported alive to the Elysian Fields; in another she is expelled by her stepson and flees to Rhodes, where she is put to death; a third makes her end her days as the wife of Achilles.¹

Many attempts have, of course, been made to euhemerize the story. Dr. Leaf says that Helen is "more than half mythical,"² by which he means that he can believe that whatever suits his theories is historically true, and treat the rest as fanciful additions. Dr. Farnell,³ with the incurable romanticism of most classical scholars, finds no difficulty in believing that "a love episode should be the cause of a great war," and speaks of lovers running away together as if the elopement of a queen was an everyday occurrence. I can, however, find in history no instance in which a queen has eloped with a foreign prince, or anyone else. He fails to notice that she was carried off at least four times, by Hermes and by a robber as well as by Theseus and Paris.⁴ The only queens who elope are the queens of myth, such as Etain, wife of Eochaidh, king of Ireland, and Guinevere, wife of King Arthur. The latter, like Helen, is said to have been carried off at least four times.⁵

There can be no reasonable doubt that this story, with all its miracles, improbabilities, and inconsistencies, is a myth, that is to say, it is a story which in its earlier forms described, and in its later forms tries to combine and explain, the various features and incidents in the worship of Helen, as it was carried on in different parts of Greece.

Perhaps the most important centre of her worship was at Sparta. There she had a great festival at which

¹ Smith, *Classical Dictionary*; H. J. Rose, op. cit.; G. Murray, op. cit., p. 205.

² *Troy*, p. 329.

³ Op. cit., p. 325.

⁴ G. Murray, op. cit., p. 206.

⁵ E. K. Chambers, *Arthur of Britain*, p. 213.

the maidens rode to her temple in chariots, and wore lotus flowers in her honour. Herodotus¹ tells us how an ugly and deformed little girl was taken to the temple of Helen by her nurse, who stood before the image, and entreated the goddess to free the child from its deformity. A woman appeared, stroked the child, and said that she should surpass all the women of Sparta in beauty, which duly came to pass.

At Rhodes she was worshipped as Helen of the Tree, and a story was told of how she had been captured by the women of Rhodes and hanged from a tree.

In Egypt, according to Herodotus,² she was worshipped as the foreign Aphrodite, and a story was told of how she had been taken from Paris by an Egyptian king and later handed back to Menelaus.

At Therapnae she had a temple, where her grave was shown, and in many places trees and wells were sacred to her. She caused the appearance of light round ships (St. Elmo's fire), and was identified with a star. She also seems to have been the moon, since there are grounds for equating Helene with Selene. Further than that, it is probably from her, rather than from the insignificant Hellen, that the Hellenes get their name.

Those who think that a woman could arrive at such a pitch of glory merely because she was exceptionally beautiful and fascinating should reflect upon Cleopatra, the most beautiful and fascinating woman in history. No miracles were performed on her behalf, no temples were erected in her honour, and she owes her fame chiefly to her suicide.

It was not merely Helen, however, and other Greek heroes and heroines of the Tale of Troy who were worshipped as gods or goddesses in Greece, but the Trojan heroes and heroines as well. Hector was worshipped at Thebes, a striking fact to which we shall return later, and Kassandra, the Trojan prophetess, was worshipped at the Spartan cities of Leuctra, Amyclae, and Therapnae, as well as in Apulia.³ Dr.

¹ Ch. vi, p. 61.

² Ch. ii, p. 112.

³ L. R. Farnell, op. cit., pp. 410-11.

Farnell accounts for these and many other facts connected with the worship of the Homeric heroes by supposing that the Greeks derived a large part of their religion from the *Iliad*, and cites as a parallel the development of Christian saint-worship under the influence of the sacred books.¹ But his whole case for the historicity of Homer is based on the assumption that the *Iliad* started as the purely secular account of a purely secular war. I know of no reason for supposing that anyone has ever derived his religion from a military chronicle, however skilfully versified.

In order to explain these facts, and the facts of Greek mythology in general, we shall have to get far from the romantic rationalizations of Dr. Farnell and his school, into the atmosphere of ritual. I shall try to convey an idea of what this atmosphere really is by quoting Professor Gronbech, who by his exposition of the Norse myths gives us perhaps as good an idea as possible of what the Homeric poems originally were.

"The poet," he says, "gives his narrative in the past "form as if it were something over and done with. . . ." "But the literary form which the myths acquired in the "hands of the poets during the Viking Age and later "obscures the actual meaning that was plain to the "listeners, when the legends were recited at the feast, "and illustrated, or rather supplemented, by rites and "ceremonial observances. . . . The legends will not "tell us what happened in some year or other according "to chronology; in our craving for a kernel of his- "torical truth in the myths, we naïvely insinuate that "the myth-makers ought to think in a system unknown "to them for the benefit of our annalistic studies. . . ." "Time is, in our experience, a stream of events de- "scending from the unknown mists of beginning and "running in a continuous flow down the future into the "unknown; to the men of the classical ages the actual "life is the result of a recurrent beginning and has "its source in the religious feast. The festival consists "of a creation or new birth outside time, eternal it

¹ L. R. Farnell, op. cit., p. 340.

"might be called if the word were not as misleading as "all others and as inadequate to describe an experience "of a totally alien character. When the priest or chieftain ploughs the ritual furrow, when the first seed is "sown while the story of the origin of corn is recited, "when the warriors act the war game, they make "history, do the real work, fight the real battle, and "when the men sally forth with the plough or the "seed or the weapons, they are only realizing what was "created in the ritual act.

"Ceremonial forms are the stream of life itself, not "narrowing banks against which life grinds its passage. "They are solemn because they are necessary. . . . To "go with the sun, to grow and let grow with the moon, "to carry out the ritual whereby kinship, whether with "men or with nature, is strengthened and renewed, "whereby the sun is held to its course and earth and "heaven preserve their youth and strength, to effect "honour and luck, to give the child its name-gift, to "drink the cup of brotherhood—this is to live. It is "forms which divide the living from the dead.

"Not only the future needed creation, the past too "had to be renewed in the *blot* [sacrifice] to retain its "reality. The eternity of life lay not in the fact that it "had once begun, but solely in the fact that it was constantly being begun, so that the blotman's sacrifice "points back as well as forward. In order to do "justice to the meaning of the *blot* we must say that "it not only condenses and renews the past, but in true "earnest creates it over and over again. . . . Now we "shall be able to look for the gods where they are really "to be found. They are present as power in the events "and power in the sacrificers. . . . The reciter and the "ritual agent is no less the subject of the poem than "the original hero himself, and no less responsible for "the happy issue of his enterprise. . . .

"In the history of the sacrificial hall, the individual "warrior is sunk in the god, or, which is the same thing, "in the ideal personification of the clan, the hero. "This form of history causes endless confusion among

"later historians, when they try their best to arrange "the mythical traditions into chronological happenings, "and the deeds of the clan into annals and lists of "kings, and the confusion grows to absurdity when "rationalistic logicians strive by the light of sound sense "to extricate the kernel of history from the husks of "superstition."¹

This view was not confined to the Norse, but was, according to Professor Hooke,² general in the ancient world. The cyclic movement of the seasons and the heavenly bodies, together with the ritual system associated with them, "inevitably tended to produce a "view of Time as a vast circle in which the pattern of "the individual life and of the course of history was a "recurring cyclic process." This view of time as a ritual circle seems to have been carried over into Christianity, since, according to Professor James,³ "in the Eucharistic sacrifice the redemptive work of "Christ was celebrated, not as a mere commemoration "of a historical event, for in the liturgy the past be- "came the present, and the birth at Bethlehem and the "death on Calvary were apprehended as ever-present "realities independent of time and space."

It is difficult for those who regard rites and ceremonies as desirable but not indispensable aids to the attainment of certain religious or social ends to understand the attitude of those to whom ritual means life, life in the social as well as in the religious sense. Ritual is far more to millions to-day than history has ever been to anyone. To all savages religion is ritual, and nothing more, and to most members of the higher religions ritual is far more important than either belief or ethics. People become, and remain, members of religious bodies (and social bodies such as the Freemasons) by performing ritual acts and uttering ritual words. As long as there is nothing novel about these

¹ W. Gronbech, op. cit., vol. i, p. 249; vol. ii, pp. 106-7, 222, 223, 226, 240, 261.

² *The Labyrinth*, p. 215.

³ *Christian Myth and Ritual*, p. 268.

acts and words, nobody troubles about their meaning. That is theology, a matter for the priests, and the chief, almost the sole, object of *their* study is to convince themselves that what they do or direct is right, that is to say, that the ritual and myth are in perfect agreement. Belief in the unity of myth and ritual is what we now call Fundamentalism, and a Fundamentalist is a person to whom the historic past is of no importance compared with the ritual past which is described in the myth. Adam really lived because he lives now—in the ritual. Criticism of the myth implies criticism of the ritual, hence the indignation of the Fundamentalists at anyone who fails to begin his history of the world with the myth of Adam. The Ancient Greeks who were, with the exception of a handful of philosophers, all Fundamentalists, had no cause to complain of their historians, since these all started their works by paying due respect to the myths, particularly the myth of Troy. They then made a big jump; according to the usual theories it was a jump of six or seven centuries, but it was really a jump from pure myth to history, although their history is not free from mythical elements. The reasons for this are firstly that there were no records upon which they could rely, and secondly that their object was not to build up a solid structure of knowledge of the past which should be available for the future, but merely to interest and edify their contemporaries.¹

The object of the poets was different. It was to combine into more or less coherent stories, and to make available for large audiences, the myths which were periodically enacted or otherwise handed on at the myriad temples and shrines of Greece. Professor Nilsson complains of "that disregard for history and "geography which is peculiar to epic poetry,"² but they were not concerned with history at all, and as for geography, it was merely a question of what would pass muster; their audiences would accept Ithaca as a

¹ G. G. Murray, op. cit., p. 2.

² Op. cit., p. 118.

large and fertile island, just as Shakespeare's would accept Bohemia as a country on the sea coast.

As for the temple myths, out of which, in all probability, the epics were composed, even those who believe in the historicity of tradition realize their ritual origin. Thus Professor Halliday says that "the story of "Lycaon, connected as it undoubtedly was with some "form of human sacrifice which seems to have persisted "up to the time of Pausanias, is an hieratic legend connected with the savage ritual of Lycaean Zeus, "appears to me almost certain. The story of the "serving up of Pelops by Tantalus may also have had a "ritual origin and have been in the first place connected "with some rite of human sacrifice and sacrament."¹

Professor Cook refers the legend of Ixion, who was bound to a wheel, to a ritual in which a man was bound to a wheel and sacrificed in the character of the sun-god, and the legend of Triptolemus, who was borne over the earth in a winged chariot, from which he introduced the blessings of corn, to a rite at Eleusis; "the "protégé of the goddess, mounting his winged seat, "was swung aloft by means of a *géranos* or scenic "crane."² And Professor Hooke³ says that "both the "Minotaur and Perseus myths involve an underlying "pattern of human sacrifice, and take us back to a stage "when myth and ritual were united."

In spite of his views on Lycaon and the Lycaean Zeus, Professor Halliday assures us that "we may "assume with some certainty that a person about whom "a legend was told was not a fictitious character, but a "real person who once existed."⁴ This is a striking example of the self-contradictions into which those who seek to establish the historicity of tradition inevitably fall. These contradictions can be resolved only by supposing that the Greeks were meticulous antiquaries who preserved through the centuries the facts of their history with the most scrupulous accuracy, and at the same time that they were people of the wildest

¹ Op. cit., p. 103.

² Op. cit., vol. i, pp. 211, 218.

³ In *Myth and Ritual*, p. 6.

⁴ Op. cit., p. 61.

imagination, who invented the most ridiculous stories about their ancestors, and believed in them as soon as they had invented them. And through all this haze of pseudo-history and pseudo-fiction we can see, not clearly yet clearly enough, the Greeks for what they really were—a highly religious people, for whom the past existed, as for the vast majority of the human race it still exists, solely in the ritual. In the light of this fact, for I venture to assert categorically that it is a fact, let us return to the Tale of Troy.

CHAPTER XV

MYTH AND RITUAL—THE TALE OF TROY

THE scientific, as contrasted with the literary, study of the Homeric poems has hardly yet begun, and cannot take us very far until a sufficient number of students has realized that the poems have no historical foundation, but that as documents illustrating the development of religious ideas and beliefs they are of the highest importance. It is impossible for one who, like myself, is neither a Greek nor a German scholar (for there is much untranslated matter on this subject in German), to do more than try to point out the direction which in my belief these studies will take.

We must first try to form a picture of Greece as it really was about 700 B.C. It was in some respects analogous to England in A.D. 600, that is to say, it was occupied by tribes of barbarians who had blotted out an ancient civilization, and were themselves beginning to be civilized through alien influence. In the case of the Greeks, as of the Saxons, we know nothing from historical, and little from archæological, sources of the origin and history of these tribes, but of the Greeks we know much less than we do of the Saxons, since the period of darkness is much longer, and we have nothing to correspond with the late classical literature. There is this other difference, that whereas the Saxons never progressed very far along the path of civilization, a very small proportion of the Greeks rapidly reached a pitch of intellectual eminence which has rarely been rivalled. That this progress was extremely rapid, and that it was based upon alien elements, are shown not merely by the known facts of contemporary and earlier Asiatic culture, but by the manners and customs of the generality of the Greeks, which up to

the end of the classical period were still almost incredibly barbarous.

About 700 B.C., then, when we first begin to know something of the Greeks, we find a small educated class making, under the most favourable social and political conditions, the most phenomenal progress from a foundation of thought and knowledge which was entirely non-Greek, and a vast majority of illiterates, who knew nothing, and could know nothing, of their past history, but who were largely absorbed in their religion. This religion, though one in origin, and generally similar in ritual, had retained or acquired varying features in the more or less isolated cities, islands, and rural valleys; it consisted of the sacrificial worship of "heroes" at local shrines, combined with group meetings at highly sacred sites for the periodical performance of more important or more generalized rites. There were in historical times a number of these group meetings, at Delphi, at Olympia, at Delos, at Dodona, at Mycale, and elsewhere, the rites at which, especially the games and contests, suggest developments or survivals from a different state of society, a state in which the kingship played a highly important part. The type of kingship suggested by these rites, and by the survivals of the kingship in historical Greece, such as that of the archon at Athens who was called the "king," and the extremely limited monarchy at Sparta, is a kingship of a purely ritual character. There is a great deal to suggest that the winners at the Games were the successors of kings who became kings as the result of success in a ritual contest, and that in prehistoric Greece, that is, Greece before about 700 B.C., kings were purely ritual figures, regarded as the personification of Zeus, and liable to be sacrificed at the end of a fixed period, which Sir James Frazer finds grounds for believing to have been eight years.¹ This aspect of the kingship, as I hope to show, is implicit in Homer and the rest of the myths, but taken as historical documents, they give a very different picture.

¹ Op. cit., vol. iv, pp. 58, 87; also vol. ii, p. 177.

The kings of Homer, taken literally, are not in the Greek sense kings at all, but tyrants who gain their thrones by successful adventure, and whose powers are limited only by their capacity for exercising them. Now the ritual kingship as we find it in the fifth century B.C., is merely a survival represented by a number of rites and institutions, all of them more or less in a state of decay. If Homer wrote history, we must then suppose that after his time the type of kingship which was familiar to him disappeared and was succeeded by a very different type, which had time to rise, thrive, and decay before the fifth century; and that the Greeks of the latter period had forgotten almost everything about the later type of kingship, but had preserved a vivid recollection of the earlier.

All the difficulties, including those set out in Chapter IX, disappear when we realize that the Homeric poems, or rather the songs and stories out of which they were composed, are myths, that is, ritual narratives, connected with one or more of the group meetings mentioned above, and that the ritual performed at these meetings was very similar to, if not identical with, the ritual pattern described by Professor Hooke.¹ It may be remembered that the principal features of this ritual are the death and resurrection of the king, a sacred combat, a triumphal procession and enthronement, and a sacred marriage, and the difference I suggested was that in Greece the actual killing of the king survived longer than in the more civilized countries to the south and east. However this may be, there is, as we have seen, evidence that the kingship in prehistoric Greece was a temporary office, and that the kings were either actually killed or else reinstated after a pretended death, at the end of eight years. Now in Greek the eight-year period was called a nine-year period, since both the first and last years were included,² and we find that in the Tale of Troy all the important incidents take place in the first and tenth years of the siege, and that in the mythological cycles, especially

¹ *Supra*, p. 153.

² J. G. Frazer, *op. cit.*, iv, p. 59 n.

those of Troy and Thebes, all the important events are represented as taking place at intervals of about ten years. But if the ritual king's reign is eight years, his ritual life is longer, since, as we shall see later, the most important events in it take place before he is actually installed. This may explain the discrepancy between the eight- and the nine- or ten-year periods, since, as we must always bear in mind, these periods are ritual, that is to say, recurrent and not historical.

The question now arises whether these rites were actually performed at Troy and at Thebes, and the probability on the whole seems to be that they were, and that the two rituals were identical. There are many resemblances between the stories of Troy and Thebes. Both were built where a cow lay down. Both were unsuccessfully attacked, but ten years later stormed and razed to the ground. According to Hesiod all the heroes of Greece were killed at one or the other. The Greek fleet which is to attack Troy meets at Aulis, a place most inconvenient for this purpose, but most convenient for an attack on Thebes, of which it is the port. Hector is a leading hero of both cities. Whether these and other resemblances are due to the partial combination of two different stories or the splitting up of what was one original story is not certain, but the latter seems more probable when we realize how easily mythical incidents can be located at actual places, and also transferred from one place to another. There is no difficulty about this, since, as we have seen in the stories of Robin Hood and other heroes, the place where the ritual is performed becomes the place where the incidents of the myth originally occurred.

We find a good example of this in Java. The war of the *Pandawa*, which forms the subject of the great Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*, is also the subject of the most popular Javanese poem, and the war is believed by the Javanese to have taken place in Java; "not only the countries mentioned in that war, but the 'dwelling-places and temples of the different heroes

"who distinguished themselves in it, are at the present day pointed out in Java."¹ The ritualistic attitude towards the past which could transfer all the sites and incidents of a mythical war from India to Java could transfer all the sites and incidents of a mythical war from Asia to Troy or Thebes.

What probably happened was that when the later forms of this kingship ritual were introduced into Greece, they were at first associated by the small independent tribes with the myths of their own gods or heroes, and that later attempts were made to combine these myths into one story. This seems to have happened in Palestine, where the origin of circumcision ritual was attributed to three different heroes, Abraham, Moses, and Joshua.²

The principal attempt to combine the myths of Greece into one story was, of course, made by Homer. And who was Homer? Homer, so Professor J. A. K. Thomson tells us, was the title given to the victor in the conquest of minstrelsy held at the festival of Apollo at Delos. He was the eponymous hero of the hymn-singers and sacred dancers, and was originally identical with the Delian Apollo.³ "The hymn," Professor Thomson continues,⁴ "has given birth to the heroic "epos. For these 'men and women' are the old local "Daimones—Achilles, Helen, and the rest. Their "legends have combined to form one great legend "recited at the Delian festival in honour of Apollo the "Father god of all the Ionians. . . . The hymn "gradually added to itself more and more of the in- "herited or borrowed legends of the Ionian race until "it grew into the proportions of all 'Homer.' And as "Homer was the traditional author of the original "hymn, so he remained the traditional author of all the "rest."

¹ T. S. Raffles, *History of Java*, vol. ii, p. 76.

² E. O. James in *Myth and Ritual*, p. 152. A similar phenomenon in America is described by Professor R. H. Lowie in *The American Anthropologist*, vol. 16, p. 107.

³ *Studies in the Odyssey*, pp. 205, 207, 224.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

Yet although the Homeric poems are concerned almost entirely with the doings of gods and worshipped heroes, and although in classical times the poems were, as Professor Thomson shows, sacred poems recited at sacred festivals, yet most classical scholars are so obsessed by their literary aspect that they become quite incapable of realizing their religious character. Thus Professor Nilsson holds that "the return and vengeance "of Odysseus is not an heroic legend but a novel,"¹ and even Professor Gilbert Murray regards the poems as "elaborate works of fiction."² As usual, these writers hover precariously between the fact theory and the fiction theory, but can they really believe that people compose fictitious tales about the gods they worship, and recite these tales at sacred festivals?

Mr. Burn³ says that "Andromache is almost certainly a creation of the poet's brain. Her and her husband's function in the poem is simply to supply a 'foil to the other characters.'" But again let us turn to Java, and there we find in the sacred epic, which is of Hindu origin, a general similarity to the Tale of Troy, and parallels to many of its characters and incidents. In particular the account of the parting of Salia from his wife Satia Wati and his subsequent death bears a striking resemblance to the account of Hector's parting from Andromache and his subsequent death.⁴

That the hero king, at the conclusion of his tenure of office, normally goes out of the city to be killed we shall see in the next chapter; it may well be that a ceremonial parting from his consort formed part of the ritual in Greece and Java as it did in Mexico, where the man who took the part of the "god of gods" bade farewell to his consorts at a fixed spot before ascending the pyramid at the top of which he was to meet his doom.⁵ Here again we must emphasize that what has to be explained is not the fact that a man should bid

¹ Op. cit., p. 137.

² Op. cit., p. 231.

³ Op. cit., p. 18.

⁴ R. S. Raffles, op. cit., vol. i, p. 510. The parallel is mine.

⁵ J. G. Frazer, op. cit., vol. ix, p. 279.

farewell to his wife before going to his death, but that such an incident should form part of a sacred poem. The idea that the subject-matter of hymns is drawn from domestic scenes, real or fictitious, is erroneous.

Let us now try to get a more general idea of the ritual of which this scene formed a part. Mr. W. F. J. Knight¹ notes that the name of Troy is widely associated with mazes or labyrinths, and that various incidents in the *Iliad* correspond with known features of a once widespread maze ritual, and says that “the “goddess or one of the heroines of Troy corresponds “to the maiden who stays in the nucleus of a maze “during a maze ritual, or to the princess who is united “to a hero in northern myths, after he has penetrated “to the heart of a mountain, sometimes by the aid of a “magic horse.” He goes on to show that ring magic and armed dances are connected both with fertility and with military defence. The wooden horse is then a ritual beast akin to Pegasus and Sigurd’s horse Grani, and is not, as has been absurdly supposed, a genuine military stratagem.

The *Iliad* is then, on Mr. Knight’s showing, an account of a ritual which includes a sacred combat and a sacred marriage. But there is much more in the Homeric poems than this. Professor Hocart gives a list of twenty-six features which characterize the ceremonies attendant on the installation of kings in all parts of the world. I believe that all of these are to be found in the Homeric poems, but the search would occupy a large volume, and I shall be content to touch on two which he includes in his list and one which he does not. He begins his list with “(A) The theory is “that the King (1) dies; (2) is reborn, (3) as a god.”² In Fiji during a chief’s installation the same ceremonies are observed as at his death, and after his installation he is nursed as a new-born babe for four days. In ancient India, according to the scriptures, the officiating priest invested the new king with garments called “the caul of sovereignty” and “the womb of sove-

¹ In *Folk-Lore*, vol. xlvi, p. 106.

² *Kingship*, p. 70.

“reignity,” and “thereby caused him to be born.” In Egypt the Pharaoh is shown on monuments being suckled by the wife of the principal god.¹ In these cases the ceremonies of death and resurrection and re-birth are symbolized, but at Umundri, in Nigeria, the rite is performed more literally. There, according to Mr. Jeffreys,² the officiating priest says to the candidate for the kinship, “You are about to enter the grave; ‘rise up again with a vivid and shining body.’” The candidate is then prepared for burial in the usual way, and buried in a grave dug outside his own house. His wives wail and the usual mourning ceremonies are performed. At sunset he is dug up, washed, and whitened all over with clay, and thus fulfils the prayer that he should rise with a white and shining body. Henceforth he is regarded as a god. We can now understand why heroes visit the underworld, the dwelling-place of the dead. They do so in order that they may return from the dead as gods. Odysseus, therefore, visits the dead as part of his progress to the divine kingship, and Heracles, Theseus, Orpheus, and Dionysus do the same. I may add that according to Mr. Knight³ “the Latin word *inire*, the origin of our word ‘initiation,’ ‘has been thought with reason to have been directly ‘used for ritual entry into the earth, as in sacrificial ‘burials.’”

After the king has been installed, he makes a tour of his dominions, always starting from the east and following the course of the sun, and at each of the four quarters receiving the homage of vassals. According to the Buddhist scriptures a king, when he has performed this rite, becomes a “wheel monarch.”⁴ In the other rituals discussed by Professor Hocart the rite has become a mere procession round the city, like our Lord Mayor’s Show, which, of course, follows his

¹ *Kingship*, pp. 74, 77, 84.

² M. D. W. Jeffreys, in a paper read to the International Congress of Anthropology, 1934.

³ Loc. cit., p. 107.

⁴ A. M. Hocart, *Kingship*, p. 23.

installation. It would seem, however, that Dhu'l Qarnein, the Two-horned One of the Qurân, was also a "wheel-monarch,"¹ as was Dermot, King of Ireland, who "on his regal circuit travelled right-handed round 'Ireland,'" and after visiting the four provinces returned to Tara.² These were inland kings, but the king of the Ægean must have made his progress by sea, and the Odyssey, though it has had other ritual features incorporated in it, would seem to be in the main an account of such a progress. The story of Sindbad the Sailor perhaps embodies a similar myth, the ritual aspect of which seems to have found its last expression in the voyages of the Areoi, the guilds of sacred actors of Polynesia.

One of the most important duties of the divine king is to rekindle the sacred fire. This rite is still performed annually at Jerusalem, though not by the normal method, which is to rotate a pointed piece of hard wood in a hole made in a piece of soft wood. In this form the rite is almost world-wide. Professor A. B. Cook³ adduces much evidence to suggest that the story of how Odysseus plunged his heated bar into the Cyclops' eye is derived from a fire-making rite, and that his title of "Ithakos," which has led to the belief that he came from the island of Ithaka, may be equivalent to "Ithax," which is an alternative name for Prometheus, and means "the fiery one." Just as "Odysseus" is the king's cult title in his character of the wolf-god,⁴ so may "Ithakos" be his cult title in his capacity as kindler of the sacred fire.

It would be possible, and indeed easy, to find parallels in myth and ritual for every incident in the Odyssey, but those given should be enough to convince any person of open mind that there is a great deal more in it than meets the eye. No argument can make any impression on the minds of the orthodox scholars, who

¹ Quarân, sura xviii, vv. 83 seq.

² S. H. O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica*, p. 86.

³ Op. cit., vol. i, p. 327.

⁴ J. A. K. Thomson, op. cit., p. 16.

refuse to look outside the text, and are content to believe that Odysseus was a real man, whose exploits gave rise to his fame, and whose fame stimulated a blind man to invent his exploits.

There is one phenomenon which actually connects "the holy town of Ilium," which, though a foreign town, was loved by Zeus, the god of the Greeks "above all cities and all nations of the earth"¹ but which he nevertheless allowed to be destroyed, with the historic city near the entrance to the Hellespont—the affair of the Locrian maidens.

Every year, from prehistoric times down to 200 B.C., and probably later, the Locrians, a people whose chief town was Opous, about twenty miles north of Thebes, sent a tribute of two noble maidens to Troy, or Ilium as it was then known. The citizens of Ilium met them and attempted to kill them, but usually without success, since they were guarded by a body of their fellow-countrymen, who smuggled them through an underground passage into the Temple of Athena. Once there, they were safe, but lived for a year a despised and degraded life as temple slaves, after which they were replaced, but were condemned to perpetual celibacy. On the rare occasions when one of the maidens was slain, her slayer received the thanks of the citizens, and her body was destroyed by a particular ritual. The Locrians made frequent attempts to rid themselves of this burden, but were always threatened by the Delphic oracle with disaster.

The explanation of this remarkable proceeding given in classical times was that it was a punishment imposed upon the Locrians for the conduct of their great cult-hero, Aias Oileus, who at the sack of Troy had violated Kassandra in the Temple of Athena. Dr. Farnell, of course, accepts this story as historically true, and in so doing misses its whole point. "No incident was more likely,"² he says, "than that a certain Greek leader should have violated the purity of a temple." But the incident, far from being "likely," is

¹ *Iliad*, vi, p. 448.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 301

represented as unparalleled; that is why, according to the story, it received a unique punishment. Professor Nilsson also fails to realize that the whole proceeding was unique, since he suggests¹ that Locris was a colony of Troy, and appears to suppose that annual tribute of maidens from a colony to the mother city was normal.

Now we must note in the first place that the whole procedure was sacrificial; the maidens, if not killed, went through a rite of pretence burial, from which they emerged as Vestals. This rite has no connection whatever with the alleged crime of Aias, but is connected with another myth, that of the theft of the Palladium by Odysseus and Diomedes, who were said to have entered Troy by the same underground passagè.² Secondly, it seems that the name "Oileus" is closely connected with "Ilion,"³ so that Aias, whose second name it was, may be suspected of being the eponymous hero of Ilium, while Kassandra, like Athene, was a city-goddess, and may be identical with her. It may be added that Pausanias describes a very similar ritual at Athens.⁴

We know from what Professor Hocart⁵ tells us that the installation of a king normally includes a sacred marriage and a human sacrifice, and I suggest that of the two maidens, who were always drawn from the alleged descendants of Aias, one was originally the divine bride and the other the divine victim. Anyhow, we know that Aias had an elaborate cult in Locris, and on the supposition that he was a real man we must conclude that the Locrians, looking back through the long centuries of their history, could find no citizen worthy of honour except a second-rate buccaneer whose infamous conduct had brought upon them eternal injury and disgrace.

Dr. Farnell's belief that personalities can be vividly remembered for eight hundred years or more is as-

¹ *Iliad*, vi., p. 46.

² W. F. J. Knight in *Folk-Lore*, vol. xlvi, p. 101 n.

³ L. R. Farnell, op. cit., p. 302.

⁴ I. xxvii, 3. ⁵ Op. cit., p. 71.

tonishing, since he must have realized how little we know, even assuming tradition to be true, of Greek pre-history. Did he really believe that during a period of at least four centuries there was nobody in Greece who possessed a personality? Of course he could not have, but like most classical scholars he had been so thoroughly soaked in the belief that tradition is history that any other view of it was inconceivable. And even those scholars who have realized that tradition in its main features is myth are ready to jump back to pseudo-history on the smallest provocation. Thus Miss Jessie Weston, in her *From Ritual to Romance*, after dealing with a large group of Grail stories, concludes that these stories "repose eventually, not upon a poet's 'imagination, but upon the ruins of an august and 'ancient ritual, a ritual which once claimed to be the 'accredited guardian of the deepest secrets of life."¹ Yet she supposes that certain historical incidents have crept into these narratives. For example, the story of how King Amangens outraged one of the Grail maidens and took her golden Cup from her, in which action he was imitated by his knights, may be the record "of an outrage offered by some, probably local, 'chieftain to a priestess of the cult."² Yet this story is clearly analogous to that of Aias and Kassandra, which we have just been discussing. And the story of how Ghaus, a squire of King Arthur, dreams of taking a golden candlestick from a chapel in the forest, and of being attacked by an ugly black man, and awakes to find himself mortally wounded, may have "made a 'profound impression on the popular imagination 'owing to the youth and possible social position of the 'victim."³ Victim of what? Miss Weston failed to realize that accounts of isolated outrages do not find their way into ancient and august rituals, and that successful breaches of taboo, far from being recorded, are ignored and their very possibility denied.

¹ J. Weston, *From Ritual to Romance*, p. 176.

² Ibid., p. 163.

³ Ibid., p. 171.

Mr. Nutt tells us that "the development of the 'mythical literature connected with the Tuatha de 'Danann may now be safely sketched. Originally, it 'doubtless consisted wholly of chants forming part of 'the ritual, and of legends accounting for and interpreting ritual acts."¹ Yet even Mr. Nutt, as we saw,² thought that there might be some historical foundation for the Irish myths. How could legends which account for and interpret ritual acts have an historical basis?

Hartland, again, realized that "the ceremony at 'Coventry is a survival of an annual rite in honour of a 'heathen goddess, from which men were excluded."³ The ceremony to which he refers is, of course, that associated with the name of Lady Godiva, and was probably similar to that at Banbury, where a fine lady rode on a white horse. Yet he postulates a different origin for many stories of the same type.

Similarly MacCulloch, who, as we saw,⁴ attributes so many traditional tales to imagination, realizes that some myths are connected with ritual. "Some of 'these," he says of the Algonquin stories,⁵ "are myths, "and in this group we have those which are recited at "the initiation of candidates . . . as well as some "which are not now recited, but are believed to have "formed part of the sacred ritual long ago. All form "part of a mythological cycle dealing with the life of "the hero-divinity, Manabush." The Homeric poems are also mythological cycles dealing with the lives of hero-divinities, but nothing arouses the fury of our scholars so much as the suggestion that these cycles are founded upon ritual. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that in their view the Tale of Troy is a sober record of historic fact, composed entirely of scraps of picturesque fiction.

There is nothing in Homer that we cannot find elsewhere; "in other poems we observe the ancient ritual "underlying poetical composition, as the substratum

¹ A. Nutt, *The Voyage of Bran*, vol. ii, p. 194.

² *Supra*, p. 99.

³ Op. cit., p. 92.

⁴ *Supra*, p. 132.

⁵ Op. cit., p. 460.

"on which the poets have moulded a literary form; "when for instance the Eddaic description of Sigurd's "dragon-killing and wooing of the sleeping woman in "armour culminates in a ritual toast . . . the succession of the scenes is probably governed by the "procedure of the feast. . . . Thor's voyage to the "giant Geirrod is really a description of the ritual "journey of the sacrificer and his assistants to the "cattle-fold, and their procedure there"¹

With this we may compare the opinion of Professor Saintyves, who holds that the magical transformations in Hop o' my Thumb and similar tales are really *étapes coutumières* in the initiation ceremony, and that ogre, giant, devil, dragon, troll, sorcerer, and cannibal are merely titles for a liturgical personage, the tempter or terrifying devil of the initiations.²

As in the myth, the epic, the saga, and the fairy-tale, so also in the ballad we find that the basis is ritual. "The earliest form of the ballad in France seems to "have been a little wooing-dance acted as a sort of "May-game and originating in the ritual wedding. "There are great numbers of such wooing-dances in "Sweden and Denmark. . . . A Danish ballad even "remembers the significance of the ritual; Ridder Stig "drinks to his lady-love so that 'field and wood "blossom thereat.' "³

¹ W. Gronbech, op. cit., vol. II, pp. 229, 274.

² Op. cit., pp. 275, 303.

³ B. S. Phillpotts, op. cit., pp. 200, 202.

CHAPTER XVI

THE HERO

IN the earlier chapters of this book I took a succession of well-known heroes of tradition, and attempted to show that there is no justification for believing that any of these heroes were real persons, or that any of the stories of their exploits had any historical foundation. In the course of the discussion I had frequent occasion to suggest that these heroes, if they were genuinely heroes of tradition, were originally not men but gods, and that the stories were accounts not of fact but of ritual, that is, myths. Since my chief object in those chapters was, however, to show that the heroes had no claim to historicity, I made no attempt to link them, or the beliefs connected with them, to any general ritual scheme. Before so doing it seemed desirable to demonstrate, both theoretically and by examples, the intimate association of myth with ritual, an association which has been recognized by many leading students of these subjects, and upon which depends the validity of the conclusions which I have reached.

Some years ago I had occasion to study the myth of Oedipus, and to try to analyse it,¹ and I was struck by the similarity of many of the incidents in it to incidents in the stories of Theseus and Romulus. I then examined the stories of a number of other traditional heroes of Greece, and found that when these stories were split up into separate incidents, there were certain types of incident which ran through all the stories.

Whether these parallels have any significance, or whether they are merely coincidences, the sort of thing that might happen to or be readily invented about any hero, are questions to which we shall come later. My first task is to show that the parallels exist, and for that

¹ *Vide my Jocasta's Crime.*

purpose it is necessary to tabulate and number them. What I have done is to take a dozen heroes whose stories are narrated in sufficient detail, to tabulate the incidents in their careers, and to regard as typical such incidents as occur in the majority of the stories. By tabulating these typical incidents, I have arrived at what appears to be a pattern, in which I include all incidents, whether they are miraculous or whether they seem insignificant, which occur with sufficient regularity. I have then fitted the pattern back on to my dozen heroes, and finding that it fits, have extended it to a number of heroes from outside the classical area, with what have been to me surprising results.

I should like it to be quite clear that in the potted biographies which follow there is no intention of giving a complete account of the heroes. Irrelevant incidents and alternative versions are omitted, and no attempt is made to distinguish between genuine mythology, that is, mythology connected with ritual, and the imitation mythology which probably forms a large part of the stories of Arthur and of Romulus. The wearing of an imitation sword may be just as significant as the wearing of a real one, and it is with the uniform of the heroes and not with their outfitters that I am at present concerned.

The pattern, then, is as follows:—

- (1) The hero's mother is a royal virgin;
- (2) His father is a king, and
- (3) Often a near relative of his mother, but
- (4) The circumstances of his conception are unusual, and
- (5) He is also reputed to be the son of a god.
- (6) At birth an attempt is made, usually by his father or his maternal grandfather, to kill him, but
- (7) He is spirited away, and
- (8) Reared by foster-parents in a far country.
- (9) We are told nothing of his childhood, but
- (10) On reaching manhood he returns or goes to his future kingdom.

- (11) After a victory over the king and/or a giant, dragon, or wild beast,
- (12) He marries a princess, often the daughter of his predecessor, and
- (13) Becomes king.
- (14) For a time he reigns uneventfully, and
- (15) Prescribes laws, but
- (16) Later he loses favour with the gods and/or his subjects, and
- (17) Is driven from the throne and city, after which
- (18) He meets with a mysterious death,
- (19) Often at the top of a hill.
- (20) His children, if any, do not succeed him.
- (21) His body is not buried, but nevertheless
- (22) He has one or more holy sepulchres.

Let us now apply this pattern to our heroes, and we will start with

OEDIPUS

His mother, Jocasta, is (1) a princess, and his father is (2) King Laius, who, like her, is (3) of the line of Cadmus. He has sworn to have no connection with her but (4) does so when drunk, probably (5) in the character of Dionysus. Laius (6) tries to kill Oedipus at birth, but (7) he is spirited away, and (8) reared by the king of Corinth. (9) We hear nothing of his childhood, but (10) on reaching manhood he returns to Thebes, after (11) gaining victories over his father and the Sphinx. He (12) marries Jocasta, and (13) becomes king. For some years he (14) reigns uneventfully, but (16) later comes to be regarded as the cause of a plague, and (17) is deposed and driven into exile. He meets with (18) a mysterious death at (19) a place near Athens called the Steep Pavement. He is succeeded by (20) Creon, through whom he was deposed, and though (21) the place of his burial is uncertain, he has (22) several holy sepulchres.

He does not seem to have been regarded as a

legislator, apart from that we may award him full marks.

THESEUS

His mother, Aethra, is (1) a royal virgin, and his father is (2) King Aegeus, who is (4) induced to have intercourse with her by a trick. He is also (5) reputed to be the son of Poseidon. At birth he is hidden from the Pallantidae, who (6) wish to kill him, and (8) reared by his maternal grandfather. We hear (9) nothing of his childhood, but on reaching manhood he (10) proceeds to Athens, (11) killing monsters on the way. He marries (12) several heiress princesses, but (13) succeeds to the kingdom of his father, whose death he (11) causes. For a time (14) he reigns peacefully, and (15) prescribes laws, but later (16) becomes unpopular, is driven (17) from Athens, and (18) is thrown or falls from (19) a high cliff. His supplanter, Menestheus, is (20) no relation. His burial place is (21) unknown, but bones supposed to be his are placed in (22) a holy sepulchre at Athens.

He scores twenty.

ROMULUS

His mother, Rhea, is (1) a royal virgin, and his father is (2) King Amulius, who is (3) her uncle, and (4) visits her in armour. He is also (5) reputed to be the son of Mars. At birth (6) his father tries to kill him, but (7) he is wafted away, and (8) reared by foster-parents at a distance. On reaching manhood he (10) returns to his birthplace, and having (11) killed his father and gained a magical victory over his brother, he (12) founds Rome and becomes king. His marriage is uncertain, and he is said to have performed some feats after his accession, but he (15) prescribes laws, and (16) later becomes unpopular. Leaving the city (17) after his deposition has been decided upon, he is (18) carried to the sky in a chariot of fire. His successor is (20) a stranger. His body (21) not having been found, he is (22) worshipped in a temple.

We can give him eighteen points.

HERACLES

His mother, Alcmene, is (1) a royal virgin, and his father is (2) King Amphitryon, who is (3) her first cousin. He is reputed to be (5) the son of Zeus, who (4) visited Alcmene in the guise of Amphitryon. At his birth (6) Hera tries to kill him. On reaching manhood he (11) performs feats and wins victories, after which he (10) proceeds to Calydon, where he (12) marries the king's daughter, and (13) becomes ruler. He remains there (14) quietly for some years, after which an accidental manslaughter compels him (17) to flee from the country. He disappears (18) from a funeral pyre (19) on the top of Mount Oeta. His sons (20) do not succeed him. His body (21) is not found, and (22) he is worshipped in temples.

He scores seventeen points.

PERSEUS

His mother, Danae, is (1) a royal virgin, and his father is (2) King Proetus, who is (3) her uncle. He is also reputed to be (5) the son of Zeus, who (4) visited Danae in a shower of gold. His mother's father (6) tries to kill him at birth, but he is (7) wasted away, and (8) reared by the King of Seriphos. We hear (9) nothing of his childhood, but on reaching manhood he (11) kills a dragon and (12) marries a princess. He then (10) returns to his birthplace, where he (11) kills his father or uncle, and (13) becomes king. We hear (14) nothing of his reign, and his end is (18) variously reported, though in one version he is killed by his successor. His children (20) do not succeed him. His burial-place is (21) unknown, but he is (22) worshipped at shrines.

He scores eighteen points.

JASON

His mother, Alcimedea, is (1) a princess, and his father is (2) King Aeson. His uncle, Pelias, (6) tries to kill him at birth, but (7) he is spirited away, and (8)

brought up at a distance by Cheiron. We hear (9) nothing of his childhood, but on reaching manhood he wins the Golden Fleece, and (12) marries a princess, after which he proceeds (10) to his birthplace, causes (11) the death of Pelias, and (13) becomes king in his stead. He is afterwards (17) driven from throne and city by his uncle's son, and his end is (18) obscure. His children do not (20) succeed him. His burial-place is (21) unknown, but he is (22) worshipped at shrines.

He scores fifteen points.

BELLEROPHON

His mother, Eurymede, is (1) a princess, and his father is (2) King Glaucus. He is also (5) reputed to be the son of Poseidon. We hear (9) nothing of his childhood, but on reaching manhood he (10) travels to his future kingdom, (11) overcomes a monster, (12) marries the king's daughter, and (13) becomes king. We hear (14) nothing of his reign, but later he (16) becomes hated by the gods, and (17) goes into exile. His fate is (18) obscure, though it includes (19) an attempted ascent to the sky. His children (20) do not succeed him, and his burial-place is (21) unknown, but he was worshipped (22) at Corinth and in Lycia.

He scores sixteen points.

PELOPS

His mother, Dione, is (1) a demi-goddess, and his father is (2) King Tantalus, but he is also (5) reputed to be the son of Poseidon. His father (6) kills him, but the gods restore him to life. We hear (9) nothing of his childhood, but on reaching manhood he (10) proceeds to his future kingdom, (11) defeats and kills the king, (12) marries his daughter, and (13) becomes king. He (15) regulates the Olympic games, but otherwise we hear (14) nothing of his reign, except that he banishes his sons, who (20) do not succeed him. He has (22) a holy sepulchre at Olympia.

We can give him at least thirteen points.

ASCLEPIOS

His mother, Coronis, is (1) a royal virgin, and his father is (5) Apollo, who (6) nearly kills him at birth. He is (7) spirited away, and (8) reared by Cheiron at a distance. On reaching manhood he (11) overcomes death, becomes (13) a man of power, and (16) prescribes the laws of medicine. Later he (17) incurs the enmity of Zeus, who (18) destroys him with a flash of lightning. His burial-place is (21) unknown, but (22) he has a number of holy sepulchres.

He scores at least twelve points.

DIONYSOS

His mother, Semele, is (1) a royal virgin, and his father is (5) Zeus, who is (3) Semele's uncle by marriage, and who (4) visits her in a thunderstorm. Hera (6) tries to kill him at birth, but (7) he is miraculously saved, and (8) brought up in a remote spot. We hear (9) nothing of his childhood, but on reaching manhood he (10) travels into Asia, (11) gains victories, and (13) becomes a ruler. For a time he (14) rules prosperously, and (15) prescribes laws of agriculture, etc., but later (17) is carried into exile. He (18) goes down to the dead, but afterwards (19) ascends Olympus. He seems (20) to have no children. He has (21) no burial place, but (22) numerous shrines and temples.

We can give him nineteen points.

APOLLO

His mother, Leto, is (1) a royal virgin, and his father is (5) Zeus, who is (3) her first cousin. At birth he is (6) in danger from Hera, but (7) his mother escapes with him, and (8) he is reared at Delos. We hear (9) nothing of his childhood, but on reaching manhood he (10) goes to Delphi, where he (11) kills the Python, becomes (13) king, and (15) prescribes the laws of music, etc.

We can take him no further, but he has scored eleven points.

ZEUS

His mother, Rhea, is (1) a goddess, and his father is (5) the god Cronos, who is (3) her brother. His father (6) tries to kill him at birth, but (7) he is spirited away, and (8) reared in Crete. We hear (9) nothing of his childhood, but on reaching manhood he (10) sets forth for Olympus, (11) defeats the Titans, (12) marries his sister, and (13) succeeds his father as king. He (14) reigns supreme, and (15) prescribes laws. Nevertheless he has (22) a holy sepulchre in Crete, and (19) hilltops are particularly sacred to him.

He scores fifteen points.

The lives of the Old Testament heroes have been heavily edited, but the same pattern is nevertheless apparent. Let us take three examples:—

JOSEPH

His mother, Rachel, is (1) the daughter of a patriarch, and his father, Jacob, is (2) a patriarch, and (3) her first cousin. His mother conceives him (4) by eating mandrakes. In his childhood his brothers (6) attempt to kill him, but he is (7) saved by a stratagem, and (8) reared in Egypt. On reaching manhood he is (11) the victor in a contest in dream-interpretation and weather-forecasting, is (12) married to a lady of high rank, and (13) becomes ruler of Egypt. He (14) reigns prosperously, and (15) prescribes laws. We hear nothing of his later years, but the mention of a king who "knew not Joseph" suggests that he fell into disfavour.

Anyhow, we can give him twelve points.

MOSES

His parents (1 and 2) were of the principal family of the Levites, and (3) near relatives; he is (5) also reputed to be the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Pharaoh

(6) attempts to kill him at birth, but (7) he is wafted away, and (8) reared secretly. We are told (9) nothing of his childhood, but on reaching manhood he (11) kills a man, and (10) goes to Midian, where (12) he marries the ruler's daughter. Returning (10) to Egypt, he (11) gains a series of magical victories over Pharaoh, and (13) becomes a ruler. His rule lasts a long time, and (15) he prescribes laws, but later he (16) loses the favour of Jehovah, is (17) removed from his leadership, and (18) disappears mysteriously from (19) the top of a mountain. His children (20) do not succeed him. His body (21) is not buried, but (22) he has a holy sepulchre near Jerusalem.

He scores twenty points, several of them twice, or, if we include Josephus's account, even three times.

ELIJAH

After (11) a victory in a rain-making contest, he becomes (13) a sort of dictator. A plot is made against him (16), and he flees (17) to Beersheba, after which he (18) disappears in a chariot of fire. He had previously (19) brought down fire from heaven to a mountain-top. His successor, Elisha, is (20) no relation. His body is (21) not buried, but (22) he has a holy sepulchre.

We know nothing of his parentage and birth, but can give him nine points.

We find the same pattern in the life of a Javanese hero.

WATU GUNUNG

His mother, Sinta, appears (1) to be a princess, and his father is (2) a holy man. Since his mother sees his father only in a dream, the circumstances of his conception are (4) unusual. When quite young he incurs his mother's wrath, and she (6) gives him a wound on the head. He (7) flees into the woods, and does not return. We are told (9) nothing of his childhood, except that he is brought up by a holy man in (8)

a far country. On reaching manhood he (10) journeys to a kingdom where (11) he kills the king, and (13) becomes king in his stead. After this he (12) marries his own mother and sister, who do not recognize him. For a long time he (14) reigns uneventfully, and has a large family, but eventually his mother recognizes the scar she gave him when a child, and is overcome with grief. The gods having (16) refused his request for another wife, he (17) invades heaven, but the gods, having learnt by a stratagem the answer to his riddle and the secret of his invulnerability, put him to death (19) there by (18) separating his arms. His sons do not (20) succeed him, and (21) there is no mention of his burial.

His story, as given by Sir Stamford Raffles,¹ is obviously incomplete, yet its resemblance to the Oedipus myth is striking, and we can give the hero eighteen points.

Let us now transport ourselves to the Upper Nile, where we find that Nyikang, the cult-hero of the Shiluk tribe, is represented as following a career which affords a number of resemblances to our pattern.²

NYIKANG

His mother, Nyikaia, was apparently (1) a crocodile princess, and his father was (2) a king. We hear (9) nothing of his childhood, but when he reaches manhood his brother (6) tries to kill him. He goes (10) to another country, and (12) marries a king's daughter. After (11) a number of victories, actual and magical, he (13) becomes king. For a time he reigns (14) prosperously, and (15) prescribes laws, but at last the people begin (16) to complain against him. Distressed at this, he (18) disappears mysteriously. Though (21) not buried, he (22) has a number of holy sepulchres.

He scores fourteen points.

¹ *History of Java*, vol. i, pp. 421-4.

² *Vide D. S. Oyler in Sudan Notes and Records*, vol. i, pp. 107, 283.

Let us now come nearer home, and consider some of the heroes of Northern Europe:—

SIGURD OR SIEGFRIED

His mother, Siglinde, is (1) a princess, and his father is (2) King Sigmund, who is (3) her brother, and whom she (4) visits in the guise of another woman. On reaching manhood he (10) performs a journey, (11) slays a dragon, (12) marries a princess, and (13) becomes a ruler. For a time he (14) prospers, but later (16) there is a plot against him, and he is killed. He is (19) the only man who can pass through a ring of fire to a hilltop.

He scores eleven points.

The next two examples which I shall give are Celtic and are interesting as showing how variations of the same theme can exist in the same culture area. The story of Llew Llawgyffes is given by Professor W. J. Gruffydd.¹

LLEW LLAWGYFFES

His mother, Arianrhod, is (1) a royal virgin, and his father is apparently Gwydion, who is (2) a prince, and (3) her brother. The circumstances of his conception are (4) unusual, since his mother believes herself to be a virgin at the time of his birth. As soon as he is born he is (7) spirited away by his father, and (8) nursed by a foster-mother. When less than two years old he is (9) a "big lad," and (10) returns to the court. With his father's help, he (11) wins magical victories, (12) marries a supernatural being, and (13) becomes a ruler. For a time he rules uneventfully, but later (16) loses favour with his wife, who (17) induces him to leave his court. He is (18) speared, but flies off in the form of an eagle, from (19) a curious elevated position. He has (20) no children, and (21) no real death or burial.

He scores seventeen points.

¹ *Math vab Mathonwy*, pp. 17 seq.

ARTHUR

His mother, Igraine, is (1) a princess, and his father is (2) the Duke of Cornwall. He is, however, (5) reputed to be the son of Uther Pendragon, who (4) visits Igraine in the Duke's likeness. At birth he is apparently in no danger, yet is (7) spirited away, and (8) reared in a distant part of the country. We hear (9) nothing of his childhood, but on reaching manhood he (10) travels to London, (11) wins a magical victory, and (13) is chosen king. After other victories, he (12) marries Guinevere, heiress of the Round Table. After this he (14) reigns uneventfully, and (15) prescribes the laws of chivalry, but later there is (16) a successful conspiracy against him, while (17) he is abroad. He meets with (18) a mysterious death, and his children do not (20) succeed him. His body is (21) not buried, but nevertheless he has (22) a holy sepulchre at Glastonbury.

He scores nineteen points.

Traces of the pattern are also to be found in the story of

ROBIN HOOD

His father is a Saxon yeoman, but he is also (5) reputed to be the son of a great noble. We (9) hear nothing of his youth, but on reaching manhood he leads a life of debauchery until compelled to fly (10) to Sherwood, where he (11) gains victories over the Sheriff of Nottingham, (12) marries Maid Marian, the Queen of May, and (13) becomes King of May and ruler of the forest. For a long time he reigns, and (15) prescribes the laws of archery, but eventually illness overtakes him, and he (17) has to leave the forest, and meets (18) a mysterious death in (19) an upper room. He (20) has no children. The place of his death and burial are (21) variously given, but (22) miracles were performed at his tomb at Kirkley, in Yorkshire.

We can give him thirteen points.

Cuchulainn also scores a good number of points, and it is interesting to compare these heroes of myth with

Hengist, who makes a journey, wins a victory, and becomes a king, but otherwise is not alleged to have done anything which brings him within the pattern. But the story of Hengist, as I have tried to show, is not myth but pseudo-history. It may be added that although several of the incidents are such as have happened to many historical heroes, yet I have not found an undoubtedly historical hero to whom more than six points can be awarded, or perhaps seven in the case of Alexander the Great. The differences between the hero of myth and the hero of history will emerge from our discussion of the significance of the pattern, which had better be left to another chapter.

CHAPTER XVII

THE HERO (*Continued*)

THE fact that the life of a hero of tradition can be divided up into a series of well-marked features and incidents—I have taken twenty-two, but it would be easy to take more—strongly suggests a ritual pattern. I doubt whether even the most fervent Euhemerist would maintain that all these resemblances are mere coincidences, and, if not, then three possibilities remain. The first is that all, or some, of the heroes were real persons whose stories were altered to make them conform to a ritual pattern; the second is that all, or some, of them were real persons in whose lives ritual played a predominant part; and the third is that they were all purely mythical. A discussion of this question will be attempted in the next chapter; in the present one I shall review the incidents of the hero's career, as they appear in the foregoing stories, and make some suggestions as to their significance.

The first point to be noted is that the incidents fall definitely into three groups—those connected with the hero's birth, those connected with his accession to the throne, and those connected with his death. They thus correspond to the three principal *rites de passage*, that is to say, the rites at birth, at initiation, and at death. I shall have more to say on this when we reach point number nine; let us now start at the beginning.

In connection with the first two points, we note that whenever there are royalties available, the hero is the son of royal parents; that he is nearly always the first child of his mother and, except where his father is a god, of his father, and that with very few exceptions his father does not marry twice. There is, of course, nothing marvellous in all this—some historical heroes have been the eldest child of monogamous royal parents, but I have laid stress upon it because it seems

to be typical of the traditional hero, and is definitely not typical of the historical hero.

There is, it is true, a type of folk-tale in which the hero (or heroine), though of obscure origin, obtains a royal spouse and a throne, but this type of tale is probably derived from romances based on the central part of the myth, in which, as we have seen, the hero, though really of royal birth, appears, so to speak, out of the blue. In these tales we are never told of the hero's death, but merely that he "lived happily ever afterwards," which seems to suggest a desire to omit, rather than falsify, the latter part of the myth.

The fact that the hero's parents are often near relatives brings to mind the widespread custom by which kings marry their sisters, with which I have dealt elsewhere.

The circumstances in which our hero is begotten are very puzzling. When, as in the case of Heracles, a god takes the form of the hero's father, we are reminded that the Pharaoh, on particular occasions, approached his queen in the guise of a god.¹ In our stories, however, the circumstances, though almost always unusual, are extremely various, as are the guises in which the god appears. He may take the form of a thunderstorm, a bull, a swan, or a shower of gold. We may suspect, however, that the attribution of divine birth to a hero is not the result of his heroism, but is derived from the ritual union of a princess to her own husband, disguised as a god. It is comparatively easy for a man to disguise himself as a bull or swan, but while the thunderstorm and the shower of gold present greater difficulties, and require further investigation, they clearly suggest a ritual rather than a historical origin for the stories.

We now come to the attempt on the hero's life at birth, which happens in almost every case, and is one of the most striking features of the pattern. We are all familiar with such rites as that of the Phoenicians, by which the eldest son was burnt as

¹ J. G. Frazer, *op. cit.*, vol. ii, p. 133.

a sacrifice to Moloch; in our stories, it would seem, a pretence is made of sacrificing the child, and sometimes an animal is sacrificed instead. It is often the father who tries to kill the infant hero, and this brings the stories into line with that of Abraham and Isaac. The attempt on the life of Moses, like that of nearly all the other heroes, was made at birth, but the story of Abraham and Isaac suggests that at one period the Hebrews performed this rite at puberty. We may note that while a ram was sacrificed in place of Isaac, Jacob appeared before his father wearing the skin of a kid, and Joseph wore a special garment which was soaked in goat's blood. We may perhaps suppose that a pretence was made of killing the child, which was wrapped in the skin of a sacrificed goat, and soaked in its blood. Such a rite accounts for some of our stories, such as that of Pelops, and also the widespread story of the Faithful Hound. Sometimes, it would seem, the child itself was wounded in the leg; hence perhaps the name "Oedipus," "swell-foot," and the many heroes who are lame, or who have scars on their legs. Many of the infant heroes, however, are set afloat in baskets or boxes, and these stories are found not merely in Greece and Western Asia, but as far east as Japan.¹ I shall discuss them no further, except to say that while the story of the attempt on the infant hero's life can be explained as ritual, it is, though not miraculous, absent or, at any rate, extremely rare in the case of genuinely historical heroes.

Having escaped death, our heroes are all removed to a distance, and are usually brought up by a foreign king, though Jason and Asclepios are brought up by Cheiron. The latter is easy to understand if we suppose that Cheiron was the title given to a prince's official tutor, but nearly all our heroes are brought up by kings. This suggests several possibilities. The first is that it was actually the practice for kings to send their sons to be brought up by other kings, as we read of in

¹ B. H. Chamberlain, *The Kojiki*, p. 21; Frazer collects a number of these stories, *Folklore in the O.T.*, vol. II, pp. 437 seq.

the story of Hakon Adalstein's fostri. The second, which I have put forward elsewhere,¹ but which I am by no means confident about, is that princes succeeded their fathers-in-law, but became their sons by formal adoption. This might lead to a belief, or a pretence, that they were their real sons who had been removed at birth. The third is the opposite of the second. It is that it was part of the ritual that the prince, though a native, should pretend to be a foreigner. The question needs much more investigation than I have been able to give it.

We next come to point number nine, that we are told nothing of the hero's childhood. This may seem unimportant, since there are, of course, many great men of whose childhood we know nothing. In such cases, however, we equally know nothing of the circumstances of their birth. We may know the place and date, but that is all. With our heroes it is quite different; their birth is the central feature in a series of highly dramatic incidents—incidents which are related in considerable detail, and such as seldom, if ever, occur in the lives of real people. The most exciting things happen to our hero at birth, and the most exciting things happen to him as soon as he reaches manhood, but in the meantime nothing happens to him at all. If, as I suppose, our hero is a figure not of history but of ritual, this is just what one would expect, since as a general rule children take no part in ritual between the rites at birth and those at initiation. The story of the hero of tradition, if I understand it aright, is the story of his ritual progress, and it is therefore appropriate that those parts of his career in which he makes no ritual progress should be left blank. I would compare the blank which occurs during childhood with the blank which occurs after his installation as king has been completed.

The fact that on reaching manhood the hero forthwith sets out on a journey from the land of his upbringing to the land where he will reign is, of course,

¹ Op. cit., p. 195.

involved in the problem which I have discussed under point number eight—that is, his being reared in a far country. It is, however, a remarkable fact that his victories almost always take place either on the journey or immediately after arrival at his destination. He makes a definite progress from a far country to the throne, and all his feats and victories are connected with that progress. Another remarkable fact is that the hero of tradition never wins a battle. It is very rarely that he is represented as having any companions at all, and when he has he never trains them or leads them. The warrior kings of history, whether civilized or barbarian, have won their renown as leaders. When we think of them we think of serried ranks, of the Argyraspides, of the Tenth Legion, of the Guard which dies but does not surrender, and the impis which think it better to go forward and die than to go back and die. But there is nothing like that in the stories of the heroes of tradition. Our hero's followers, if any, are out of the way or killed off when his crucial fight takes place. All his victories, when they are actual fights and not magical contests, are single combats against other kings, or against giants, dragons, or celebrated animals. He never fights with ordinary men, or even with ordinary animals. And the king whom he fights is the king whom he will succeed, and who is often his own father. It is also possible that the monster with which the hero fights is merely the reigning king in disguise, or, in other words, that the reigning king had to wear an animal costume or mask in which to defend his title and his life. I will return to that later, but will first touch on the magical contest, which seems sometimes to be more important than the actual fight. Oedipus wins his throne by guessing a riddle, Theseus his by finding the way out of a maze. The magical victories of the three Jewish heroes are all connected with rain-making; Joseph successfully prognosticates the weather; Moses is successful in a series of magical contests in which rain-making is included, and Elijah defeats the prophets of Baal in a rain-making contest.

Power over the elements is the most unvarying characteristic of the divine king, and it would seem that sometimes at least the candidate for the throne had to pass in a rain-making test.¹

Our hero, then, has to qualify for the throne in two ways: he must pass a test in some such subject as rain-making or riddle-guessing, and he must win a victory over the reigning king. Whether this was a real fight or a mock contest in which the conclusion was foregone we cannot be certain. There have undoubtedly been many cases in which the king was put to death at the end of a fixed term, or when his powers began to wane. There may have been cases in which there was a fair fight with equal weapons between the king and his challenger, but the evidence for them is rather uncertain. What several of the stories suggest is that the old king was ritually killed, and that his successor had to kill an animal—wolf, boar, or snake—into which his spirit was supposed to have entered. I shall refer to this again when we come to point number eighteen.

After passing his tests and winning his victories the hero marries the daughter, or widow, of his predecessor, and becomes king. It has often been assumed from this that the throne always went in the female line, and that the reigning queen or heiress could confer the title to it upon her husband simply by marrying him; in other words, that any man who managed to marry the queen became king automatically, whatever his antecedents, and that the only way in which any man could lawfully become king was by marrying the queen. Such an assumption is going a great deal beyond the evidence of the stories, which suggest that the new king established his title to the throne by his birth, his upbringing, and his victories. There were, it would seem, recognized qualifications for the kingship, just as there were recognized qualifications for the queenship. We do not know for certain that the new queen

¹ Some interesting suggestions on this point are made by Dr. C. B. Lewis, *Classical Mythology and Arthurian Romance*, pp. 41-5.

was really the old queen's daughter, any more than we know for certain that the new king was really the old king's son. There may have been a ceremony of adoption in both cases, and in many tales of the Cinderella and Catskin types the future queen has to achieve her journey, her tests, and her victory. There is evidence, too, that at Olympia the winner of the girls' race became Hera, just as the winner of the men's race became Zeus.¹

Anyhow, the fact that our hero marries a princess and at the same time ascends the throne is far from proving that he ascends the throne by virtue of his marriage. It may merely indicate what we know from other sources to be a fact, namely, that a *hieros gamos* or sacred marriage normally formed an essential and highly important feature of the coronation or installation ceremony. I know of no case, in any age or country, in which a man has become king simply by marrying the queen; he must first, so far as I can learn, have qualified for the throne, either by birth, or by performing some feat or passing some test, and our heroes seem all to have qualified in all these ways. Even in modern Europe marriage never confers the right to a throne; princes and princesses who marry unqualified persons, who contract, that is to say, what are called morganatic marriages, not merely fail to raise their partners to the throne, but lose their own title to it. It is difficult to believe that the rules were less strict in ages when the ritual functions of a king and queen were far more important than they are to-day. The chief qualification for the throne has always been the possession of power, the power that is conferred by divine descent and the absorption of divine wisdom, and that is demonstrated by victory over the elements and over man. The conqueror may become king, since by his conquests he proves his possession of power, but that it has ever been believed that such power is conferred by a simple marriage ceremony is unproved and improbable.

¹ J. G. Frazer, op. cit., vol. iv, p. 91.

Our hero has now become king, and what does he do? It might be supposed that, having shown himself so brave and enterprising before coming to the throne, he would forthwith embark upon a career of conquest; found an empire and a dynasty; build cities, temples, and palaces; patronize the arts; possess a large harem; and behave generally as the conquering heroes of history have behaved, or tried to behave. The hero of tradition, however, in this as in most other respects, is totally unlike the hero of history. He does none of these things, and his story, from the time of his accession to the time of his fall, is as a rule a complete blank. The only memorial of his reign, apart from the events which begin and end it, is the traditional code of laws which is often attributed to him. As a fact, however, a code of laws is always the product of hundreds, if not thousands, of years of gradual evolution, and is never in any sense the work of one man. One man, a Justinian or a Napoleon, may cause laws to be codified, or may alter their incidence, but it has never been suggested that all, or even any, of the laws in their codes were devised by these monarchs. It is well known, in fact, that they were not. On the other hand it has been clearly shown by Sir James Frazer¹ that the Ten Commandments, in their familiar form, could have had nothing to do with Moses, since the original Ten Commandments, whoever first composed them, were entirely different. It seems clear, then, that the attribution of laws to a hero of tradition is merely a way of saying that they are very old and very sacred.

Our next point is that the hero of tradition, unlike most heroes of history, normally ends his career by being driven from his kingdom and put to death in mysterious circumstances. Sigurd is the only one of those whom we have considered of whose death we have a clear and non-miraculous account; even of Joseph we are told nothing of what happened between his father's death and his own. We may conclude that deposition and a mysterious death is a part of the

¹ *Folklore in the Old Testament*, vol. iii, p. 115.

pattern, but a puzzling feature is that there is nothing to suggest that the hero suffers a defeat. As he has gained the throne by a victory, one would expect him to lose it by a defeat, but this he never does.

Oedipus kills his father and marries his mother; one might expect that one of his sons, or some other prince, would kill him and marry Jocasta, or, if she were too old, Antigone, and become king. Creon, however, who succeeds him, does so by turning the oracle against him, and several others among our heroes fall out with a god and, of course, get the worst of it. Others become unpopular with their subjects. In either case the hero's fall from favour is not gradual but sudden; at one moment he is apparently in full favour both with gods and men, and the next he has no friends, either human or divine.

The hero's death is mysterious, but one thing clear about it is that it never takes place within the city. Usually he is driven out, but sometimes he has left the city on some sacred mission. Then there is the hill-top, which appears in the stories of Oedipus, Theseus, Heracles, Bellerophon, and Moses, and which is suggested in several of the others. Taken in conjunction with the chariot of fire in which Romulus and Elijah disappear, and the lightning flash which kills Asclepios, it seems justifiable to conclude that in the most usual form of the rite the divine king was burned, either alive or dead, on a pyre erected on a hill-top, and that he was believed to ascend to the sky, in some form or other, in the smoke and flame. It is possible that, before being burnt, he was compelled to fight with and be defeated by his successor, but in the majority of stories there is nothing to suggest this.

The fact that the hero is never succeeded by his son—Nyikang seems to be the sole exception—might suggest that the inheritance went in the female line, but then no hero is succeeded by his son-in-law. If the king reigned for eight years only, and married at his coronation, his children could not succeed him, since they would be too young, but they might succeed his

successor, and there is some evidence that this is what happened. The succession at Thebes is not easy to make out, but Creon seems to have preceded and succeeded Oedipus, and also to have succeeded his sons. Perseus is said to have killed and succeeded Proetus, and to have been killed and succeeded by the latter's son. Aegisthus kills and succeeds Agamemnon, and eight years later is killed and succeeded by the latter's son Orestes. There were two royal families at Sparta, and it is possible that originally they reigned alternately.

The last point to be considered in the hero's career is that although he is usually supposed to have disappeared, yet nevertheless he has a holy sepulchre, if not several. I have attempted to explain his disappearance by suggesting that he was cremated, but if kings were cremated they could hardly have a sepulchre in the usual sense of the term, since we know that in all forms of religion the essential feature of a sepulchre, or shrine, is that it is supposed to contain the bones, or at any rate some of the bones, of the holy person to whom it is dedicated. A great deal has, of course, been written on the customs of the Greeks with regard to the disposal of the dead, and their beliefs about the other-world, but I am here concerned merely to consider the rites which are suggested by the hero stories, and what they suggest to me is that, while ordinary people were buried, the bodies of kings were burnt, but not burnt thoroughly, so that the bones were left, and could be buried. I understand that this view was put forward by Dörpfeld, though on different grounds, some thirty years ago, but I have not been able to see what he wrote. At any rate, similar customs are found in many parts of the world.

In conclusion, I should like to make it quite clear that I do not claim to have produced final solutions for any of the problems which I have discussed in this chapter. What I have tried to show is they are problems of custom and ritual, and not problems of history.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HERO (*Continued*)

IN the last two chapters I have shown, I hope, in the first place that a definite and highly complex pattern is to be traced in the accounts which we have of traditional heroes from many parts of the world, but especially the Eastern Mediterranean, and secondly, that all the features of this pattern can be identified as features of known rituals. It remains to consider the general meaning and idea at the back of the "hero," and how far traditional heroes were ever real men. Let us consider the latter point first. In so doing we must ask in each case two questions—whether there is any contemporary record of the hero's existence, and whether he is alleged to have done anything that is *not* mythical. As to the former we cannot, of course, be absolutely certain, but it seems pretty safe to say that, although some of them, such as Arthur and Robin Hood, are alleged to have lived at dates when written records were made, yet of none of them, with the very doubtful exception of Elijah, can it be said that we have contemporary evidence for their existence. The exception of Elijah is doubtful not merely because we do not know when the passages relating to him were written, but because he has perhaps less claim than any of the others to be considered historical, since, apart from his running twenty miles across country, nothing is reported of him which is not miraculous.

And this must be our criterion. When we are certain that nothing about our hero was written down till a century or more after his alleged death, we can conclude unhesitatingly that he is mythical, but when we are not certain we must judge as best we can by the reported incidents of his career. They may, of course, have been rationalized, as Elijah's have not been, but even when they have been so rationalized we can often

recognize them as mythical, since the rationalizers as a rule cannot get away from the pattern, the pattern which I dealt with in Chapter XVI.

The fact, however, that our heroes sometimes go beyond this pattern does not indicate that they are historical, since they may merely get into another pattern. The Twelve Labours of Heracles, for example, are outside my pattern, but they are clearly ritual and not historical; similarly the water which allows Moses to cross safely but drowns his pursuer forms part of a widespread myth with which I have already dealt.¹

It is possible that some of the heroes were real persons, whose actions were recorded, but whose real careers became for some reason swamped by myth. I shall discuss in the next chapter the attribution of mythical features to historic characters, but that is another matter, since in the case of these historic characters it is their historic deeds which are important, and the myths mere excrescence. Alexander's alleged miraculous birth does not affect our view of the Battle of Arbela. But if we subtract the myths from the heroes with whom I have dealt, little or nothing remains. Miracles and mythical incidents are all that we are told of them, or at least all that is of any interest. What would the story of Perseus be without the Gorgon's head, or that of Bellerophon without his winged steed? Very little, and even Moses would be much less interesting without his magic rod. It may be suggested that King Alfred is less interesting without the cakes, but though such foolish stories may amuse the unlettered, they are a nuisance to serious students of the life and times of this great ruler. Would anyone, however, venture to say that the story of Medusa is a nuisance to students of the life and times of Perseus? Of course this story, and the dragon-slaying, make up the life of Perseus; apart from these and his mother's brazen tower there is nothing to distinguish him from a score of heroes. The difference between the story of

¹ *Supra*, p. 137.

an historical character and that of a hero of tradition is that in the former case we may find myths or fables loosely and as a rule unsuitably tacked on to a record of well-attested fact, while in the latter case the story consists of some striking miracles against a background of typical myth.

The old-fashioned view, namely, that all these heroes were real men, whose eminence led to their deification or canonization, was put forward by Sir William Ridgeway, who tells us that "dramatizations "of his exploits or sufferings, like dances, eulogies, "paintings, and statues, is one of the regular methods "of propitiating a man of outstanding personality, at "every stage from his actual lifetime, after his death "when now canonized as hero or saint, and finally "when he may even have been promoted to the fore- "most rank of the great divinities."¹ Here Sir William, as throughout his works, assumes what he professes to prove; he fails to observe the pattern which runs through these hero stories, and finally he contradicts himself, since he shows that those who receive cults are, on the assumption that they were real people, persons of quite insignificant personality. Thus he says that "popular deification often arises out of mere pity "for those who have suffered tragic fates, such as the "boy-bridegroom, Dhola, who died on his wedding- "day,"² and that "if it should turn out that in some, at "least, of the rites and shrines of Cybele representa- "tions of the body of Attis were exhibited . . . then "the evidence will point still more directly to his having "once been a youth, whose tragic fate . . . impressed "his contemporaries, and led to his worship."³

The theory that people are in the habit of making gods out of youths who happen to be killed out hunting or to die on their wedding-day is not only absurd in itself, but is in flagrant contradiction to what he says about outstanding personalities, since if Dhola and

¹ W. Ridgeway, *Dramas and Dramatic Dances*, p. 210.

² Ibid., p. 208.

³ Ibid., p. 92.

Attis had been real persons, they obviously could not have been outstanding personalities.

Sir William Ridgeway, and many of those who think like him, seem never to have asked themselves why people worship gods. That pity has ever led to worship is both highly improbable in theory and against all the known facts. These show that the idea of deity and the idea of power are and always have been inseparably connected. The power of the god may be for good or for evil, it may be general or particular, but power he always has, and it is this power, and nothing else, which leads to his worship. All the names and attributes of a god are names and attributes of power. The god may die, since death may be a promotion to a higher sphere, but he dies of his own volition. It is in this fact that we must look for an explanation of the phenomenon which we discussed in the last chapter, namely, that though the hero gains his throne by a victory, he never loses it by a defeat. The end of most of the heroes is, as we have seen, left obscure, but a number of them, such as Dionysos, Heracles, Moses, Elijah, Nyikang, are represented as committing suicide, and thereby securing promotion to divine rank. We have also good reason to believe that Attis was thought of as a hero who attained through suicide his promotion to divine rank. We will return to Attis presently. Here we must note that he was believed by his worshippers to possess power in the highest degree, the power of conferring everlasting life. No attempt, so far as I can learn, has been made to explain why anyone should suppose that a youth, of whom nothing was known but that he met with an accidental death, should be capable of conferring everlasting life.

Egyptologists fall into a similar error when they suppose Osiris to have been a real man. Dr. Blackman, for example, thinks that he was an early king who "did 'much to advance agriculture and civilization in 'general among his subjects, and who met his death at 'the hands of a rebellious . . . vassal."¹ But in real

¹ In *Myth and Ritual*, p. 38.

life no progressive monarch has been deified, or even sanctified; any interest in him that may survive his death is purely historical. Dr. Blackman appears to suppose that the ancient Egyptians, feeling the need for a supreme deity, hunted about for a suitable man upon whom to confer this title, and found him in the shape of a defeated king, or, alternatively, that it was the defeat and death of Osiris which led the Egyptians to believe in the existence of omnipotent deities.

Euhemeros was, of course, a sceptic, and he was concerned rather to explode religious beliefs rather than to explain the nature of religion, but his theory has had very wide effects, and many people, including those whom I have quoted, have mistaken for science what was really anti-religious propaganda. "The gods, "according to this theory," says Professor Bevan,¹ "were kings and great men of old, who had come to be "worshipped after their death in gratitude for the bene- "fits they had conferred. On this view there was "nothing monstrous in using the same forms to express "gratitude to a living benefactor. In so far as the "worship of living men arose from these conditions, it "was a product, not of superstition, but of rational- "ism." In Greece, in the fourth century B.C., there is no doubt that people did say, "X is a very powerful "monarch; let us deify him," and even "Y was a very "fine man; let us deify him," or words to that effect, but such an attitude is, as Professor Bevan says, a product of rationalism. It throws no light on the origin of the belief in gods, nor does it bear any resemblance to the normal attitude of worshippers towards the deities they worship. These are conceived of as superhuman beings of unlimited power, and between these beings and organized bodies of men there exists a continuing relationship of mutual service. With this relationship we are not here concerned further than to try to ascertain what part the hero plays in it. To do so we must study certain heroes from an angle rather different from that adopted in Chapter XVI.

¹ In *Hastings' Encyclopaedia*, vol. iv, p. 525.

In his *Mexico Before Cortez*,¹ Mr. J. E. Thompson tells us that "there is one man who stands out against this background of confusion, although he, too, emerges a shadowy figure in floodlights fogged by contradiction. This was Quetzalcoatl, possibly the last Toltec ruler. Quetzalcoatl, which means Quetzal-bird-serpent, was also the name of an important Mexican deity, whose name was borne by the Toltec high priests, who were in turn temporal rulers. Great confusion has naturally ensued, for the acts of god and individual are inextricably confused."

We find that Quetzalcoatl was represented as or by:—

- (1) A sky god.
- (2) The living representative of a line of priestly rulers.
- (3) An idol, part man and part bird-serpent.
- (4) Certain animals, to wit the quetzal-bird and the serpent.
- (5) An ancient hero.

Let us now transport ourselves to the Upper Nile, and return to Nyikang, whose career we have already examined. We find that he is represented as or by:—

- (1) A sky god.
- (2) The living representative of a line of priestly rulers, the divine king.
- (3) An idol, "the effigy called Nyikang."
- (4) Certain animals, particularly a species of white bird.
- (5) An ancient hero.²

Let us now descend the Nile to ancient Egypt. There we find that Horus was represented as or by:—

- (1) A sky god, whose eye was the sun.
- (2) The living representative of a line of priestly rulers, the Pharaoh.

¹ p. 20.

² C. G. and B. Z. Seligman, *The Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan*, pp. 37 and 75 seq.

- (3) An idol, showing him as a man with a hawk's head.
- (4) The hawk.
- (5) An ancient hero.

Moving on into Asia, we find that Attis, whom, as we saw, Ridgeway supposed to have been a youth, was represented as or by:—

- (1) A sky god, responsible for the weather and the crops.
- (2) A high priest who regularly bore the name of Attis.
- (3) An idol made from a pine-tree.
- (4) A bull.
- (5) An ancient hero.¹

The foregoing gods or heroes, whichever one chooses to call them, have all been represented by euhemeric writers as real men. Now let us consider Dionysos. He was:—

- (1) A sky god, and at his festival at Athens, the great Dionysia, was represented by:—
- (2) His priest,
- (3) His image, and
- (4) A bull. He was also—
- (5) An ancient hero.

On this last point we have other evidence than that he scores nineteen points out of twenty-two in my pattern of the traditional hero. He is sometimes actually addressed as a hero in ritual,² and at Megara there was a shrine to "Dionysus the Ancestor,"³ which suggests that the Megarians, at any rate, regarded him as a real man. I cannot find, however, that any scholar regards Dionysos as a real man, though the reasons for so doing seem just as good as those for regarding any other prehistoric hero as a real man.

¹ Frazer, *Golden Bough*, vol. v, pp. 263 seq.

² A. C. Pearson in *Hastings' Encyclopaedia*, vol. vi, p. 653.

³ L. R. Farnell, op. cit., p. 64.

It seems clear, however, that these and other gods, whether they have been supposed to be promoted men or not, have a definite pattern in their attributes and their cult. In the first place they are sky gods, responsible for the weather and the crops; in the second they are incarnate in kings or priests; in the third they are represented by idols and other objects of cult; in the fourth they have an intimate relation with certain species of animals. Finally they are believed to have been heroes who once lived upon earth, and whose careers corresponded more or less completely to the pattern which we have discussed at length in the last two chapters. To assume that these hero stories were earlier than the rest of their attributes is as purely gratuitous as to assume that the non-miraculous is always earlier than the miraculous, or that the gods in the Homeric poems are late interpolations; such assumptions arise from obsession by euhemeristic theories and not from a study of the facts, since the facts, both of myths and of cult, afford no grounds for supposing that any of the attributes is older than the rest. The conclusion that suggests itself is that the god is the hero as he appears in ritual, and the hero is the god as he appears in myth; in other words, the hero and the god are two different aspects of the same super-human being. The myth describes the victories which the hero won over the forces inimical to his people, the laws and customs which he instituted for their benefit, and finally the apotheosis which enables him still to be their guardian and guide. When recited in full it embraces all his attributes, as god, as divine man, as idol, and as animal, and thus explains and justifies the whole of the ritual with which he is worshipped.

With a few distinguished exceptions, such as Professor J. A. K. Thomson, scholars have failed to realize this connection between the god and the hero. The reason for this is that they tend to concentrate on a very limited class of phenomena. Brought up on Homer and the Attic dramatists, they pay less attention to what the heroes are actually alleged to have

done than on the words which the poets have put into their mouths. On these they base character studies of the heroes, failing to recognize that the words are not those of the heroes but are those of the poets. The fact is, I am afraid, that scholars as a class are romantically rather than scientifically minded. The reading of the *Iliad* or of the *Seven Against Thebes* fills them with emotion, but since they are unwilling to admit that it is emotion of similar type to that experienced by the small boy who reads *Treasure Island*, they attempt to conceal it by throwing over it a veil of pseudo-history. This veil takes the form of a fabled Heroic Age, in which, apparently, the principal features of life were dragons, single combats, and elopements. In my view it is just as reasonable to suppose that there was once a Comic Age, in which life was made up of back-chat, disguises, and practical jokes, and a Tragic Age, in which people were always murdering their nearest relatives, and true love led to untimely death.

This seems to have been the view of Sir William Ridgeway, who believed not only in an Heroic Age, but in a Comic Age as well. He tells us that "it is in "the *kyogen* [Japanese comedy] that we get the true "pictures of the social and national life of the Oshi- "kaga period (1338-1597). It was a period of high "ideals, with a few great men towering above the rest "and bearing witness to the priestly holiness and "knightly bravery of an age gone by. These are "brought before us in the *no* [tragedy]. But it was also "a period of mediocre performances; the country "swarmed with contemptible and ignoble lords and "knights who disgraced their swords, and priests who "disgraced their religion. Mingled with these were "dreamy scholars, who were incapable of managing "their money matters, and innocent country people "who were the sport of every designing rascal."¹ It is astonishing that he should have taken the stock figures of comedy for real people, but not more so than that he and others should have taken the stock figures of

¹W. Ridgeway, *Dramas and Dramatic Dances*, p. 333.

myth for real people. All three conceptions, those of the tragic, the heroic, and the comic, are derived from the poets, and the poets were not interested in historical fact. It may be objected that poets nevertheless do sometimes mention historical facts, and that myths are sometimes attached to real historic heroes. We must next consider how this comes about.

CHAPTER XIX

MYTH AND THE HISTORIC HERO

IF I were to find it stated in one account that X had a black beard, and in another account that X always wore a red coat, I might combine these two statements into one and say, "We are told that X had a black "beard and always wore a red coat." By so doing I should be following the example of many historians and of all pseudo-historians, and should be making a statement that is inaccurate, misleading, and quite unjustifiable. For we are not, in the example which I have given, told that X had a black beard *and* always wore a red coat. The "and" is supplied by me, and I have no right to supply it unless I give my authorities for the two statements, and show that they are of similar origin and equal value. It is possible that one may be historical, derived, that is to say, from contemporary written records, while the other may be based on dramatic or pictorial representation, or some other form of tradition. To combine into a single narrative statements derived from dissimilar sources is to supply false links, and false links are equivalent to false statements. Yet our pseudo-history, and even our history, are full of such false links; the practice has always been to accept as history any tradition that can be fitted in, and the distinction between history and tradition has thereby become blurred to such an extent that its existence is barely recognized. So far has the process gone that we find eminent writers describing as "historical," characters for whose existence there is no historical evidence at all. If, however, we take any really historical person, and make a clear distinction between what history tells us of him and what tradition tells us, we shall find that tradition, far from being supplementary to history, is totally unconnected with it, and that the hero of history and

the hero of tradition are really two quite different persons, though they may bear the same name. I shall illustrate this fact by studying in some detail what is told us by history and by tradition of King Henry V.

King Henry V gained a glorious victory at Agincourt, and afterwards captured Paris. He married the French king's daughter, was recognized as his heir, and became ruler of a great part of France. He died in the midst of his victorious career. This career created a great impression upon the people, not because England benefited from his victories, which she did not, but because a king's victories have always been regarded as a proof of divine favour, and a guarantee of national prosperity. The deposition of his son, King Henry VI, was probably due in the main to a belief that the repeated defeats of his forces in France were indications of divine disfavour. At any rate the prolonged misfortunes of his reign afforded a striking contrast to the sensational victories of his father. The latter became an ideal hero, and tradition proceeded, with great promptitude, to provide him with what were regarded as the requisite antecedents. I shall explain later what I mean by this.

Into the accounts of Henry V's youth made famous by Shakespeare, it is unnecessary to go in any detail. They tell us that he spent the years preceding his accession in rioting and debauchery in and about London, in company with highwaymen, pickpockets, and other disreputable persons; that he was imprisoned by Chief Justice Gascoigne, whom after his accession he pardoned and continued in office; and that after his accession his conduct changed suddenly and completely. The authorities for these stories are Sir Thomas Elyot's *The Governor* (1531) and Edward Hall's *Union of the Noble and Illustrious Houses of Lancaster and York* (1542). These two highly respectable authors seem to have relied largely on matter already in print, some of it traceable to within fifty years of Henry's death. I know of no argument for the

historicity of any traditional narrative which cannot be applied to these stories; their credentials are equal to any, and far better than most—yet there is not a word of truth in any of them.

The facts are these. In 1400, at the age of thirteen, Henry became his father's deputy in Wales, made his headquarters at Chester, and spent the next seven years in almost continuous warfare with Owen Glendower and his allies. In 1407 he led a successful invasion of Scotland. In 1408 he was employed as Warden of the Cinque Ports, and at Calais. In the following year, owing to his father's illness, he became regent, and continued in this capacity till 1412. During this period his character as a ruler was marred only by his religious bigotry, and what seems to be the only authentic anecdote of the time describes the part he played at the burning of John Badby, the Lollard. In 1412 an attempt was made to induce Henry IV, whose ill-health continued to unfit him for his duties, to abdicate, but his refusal to do so, together with differences on foreign policy, led to the withdrawal of the future Henry V from Court, probably to Wales, till his father's death a year later. He did not reappoint Sir William Gascoigne as Chief Justice, and there is no foundation for the story that the latter committed him to prison.

These facts are drawn from the *Dictionary of National Biography*, which sums up the account by saying that "his youth was spent on the battlefield and "in the council chamber, and the popular tradition "(immortalized by Shakespeare) of his riotous and dis- "solute conduct is not supported by any contemporary "authority." According to Sir Charles Oman, "his "life was sober and orderly. . . . He was grave and "earnest in speech, courteous in all his dealings, and "an enemy of flatterers and favourites. His sincere "piety bordered on asceticism. . . . His enemies "called him hard-hearted and sanctimonious. . . . "The legendary tales which speak of him as a de- "bauched and idle youth, who consorted with dis-

"reputable favourites, such as Shakespeare's famous "Sir John Falstaff, are entirely worthless."¹

Even had there been no contemporary records of Henry's youth, there are points in the account adopted by Shakespeare which might lead a sober critic to doubt its veracity. Many of the episodes are in themselves highly improbable; it is difficult to imagine who could have transmitted them with knowledge and safety, and they are quite out of keeping with Henry's activities as king, all of which suggest a long apprenticeship to war and statecraft. An idle and dissolute scapegrace transformed in an instant into the first soldier and statesman of his age would indeed be an astonishing spectacle. Had, however, our critic ventured to express his doubts, with what scorn would he not have been assailed by our rationalizing professors. "Here," they would have said, "is an impudent fellow "who pretends to know more about the fifteenth "century than those who lived in it. The facts which he "dares to dispute were placed on record by educated "and responsible persons, the leading historians of "their day. Could anything be more absurd than to "suppose that they would circulate discreditable "stories about a national hero at a time when the facts "of his career must have been widely known?"

Yet these stories are, as we have seen, quite untrue. They were written down by men who, if they did not know that they were untrue, could easily have found out, and they have been, and still are, accepted by thousands in preference to the truth.

We cannot, however, suppose that these stories were pure invention. We have seen that imagination is not the faculty of making something out of nothing, but that of using, in a more or less different form, material already present in the mind. We must conclude, then, that those who composed the traditional stories about Prince Henry applied to him, in a more or less modified form, stories which they had heard in a different but not dissimilar connection. We shall fail to explain

¹ C. W. Oman, *A History of England*, pp. 219-220.

the origin of these stories unless we can trace the materials from which they were composed.

We have seen that the Falstaff stories, as we may call them, since it is round Falstaff that they revolve, are not a supplement to history, nor even a travesty of history. The Prince Henry of history, who spent his time trying to suppress the Welsh and the Lollards, and the Prince Henry of the stories, who spends his time roistering with Falstaff, may meet on the field of Shrewsbury, but they are really creatures of quite different worlds, and the world of the latter is the world of myth.

In this world of myth the principal characters are two, a hero and a buffoon, who meet with various adventures together, and live on terms of the greatest familiarity. Whence did the imagination of Shakespeare and his predecessors derive their materials for depicting such characters and incidents? The name of Falstaff may be a corruption of that of Sir John Fastolf, but their careers and characters bear no resemblance. The figure of Falstaff may have resembled that of some sixteenth-century knight, but such knight could obviously not have associated with Prince Henry. What has to be explained is not that there should be supposed to have been a man of that name, figure, and character, but that a man of such characteristics should have been associated, so closely associated, with King Henry V. It is quite clear that Shakespeare and his predecessors regarded Henry as a great hero, and it follows that they regarded association with a man of disreputable character, such as Falstaff was, as being in keeping with the character of a great hero. Elyot and Hall did not need comic relief as an excuse for introducing ribald stories, and the Falstaff incidents in Shakespeare form the principal part of the plays. It seems clear that to Shakespeare's audiences the proper way for a budding hero to behave was to roister with a drunken buffoon.

There is ample evidence that this idea did not arise in the sixteenth century, but is both ancient and wide-

spread. In Greek mythology Dionysos is, as we have seen, the type or youthful hero, and is in the habit of roistering with Silenos, a fat, drunken buffoon. The great traditional hero of the Arab world, Hârûn ar Rashid, roisters with Abu Nuwâs, his drunken jester, and, though Hârûn and Abu Nuwâs are historical, the stories told of them are not.¹ In the Indian drama there is a stock comic character called Vidusaka, who acts as a faithful, though ludicrous, companion to the royal hero, and is represented as a hideous dwarf.² Professor Ker gives us some examples from medieval literature. Thus in *Garin of Lorraine* we have Galopin, the reckless humorist. He is ribald and prodigal, yet of gentle birth, and capable of good service when he can be got away from the tavern. In *Huon of Bordeaux*, Charlot, son of Charlemagne, appears as the worthless companion of traitors and disorderly persons. In the saga of *Burnt Njal*, Kari, when avenging his father-in-law, is accompanied by one Bjorn, a comic braggart, to whom, as Professor Ker points out, he owes his preservation.³ Leif the Lucky, the alleged discoverer of America, is, as we have seen,⁴ accompanied by his father-in-law, who is a figure of fun, gets drunk, and babbles in a foreign tongue. The same idea, that of the noble knight with a comic, drunken squire, appears in *Don Quixote*.

In the Ampleforth (Yorkshire) folk-play, the clown says:—

“I was always jovial and always will be, always at one time of year,
“Since Adam created both oxen and plough, we get plenty of store and strong beer.”

He makes a series of quips in verse, after which he and the King rattle swords together.⁵ In the pantomime the clown is closely associated with the harlequin hero,

¹ W. H. Ingrams, *Abu Nuwâs, passim.*

² E. Welsford, *The Fool*, p. 62.

³ W. P. Ker, op. cit., pp. 281, 310, 314.

⁴ *Supra*, p. 72.

⁵ E. K. Chambers, *The English Folk-play*, p. 140.

and at the circus the clown is privileged to joke at the expense of the master of the ring.

There can be no doubt that Falstaff falls within the class of persons who are variously termed fools, clowns, jesters, buffoons, etc., and we shall be able to explain the part which he plays only if we can explain the origin of this class. Why did kings and other important people keep a fool or jester, a licentious character whose sallies were often directed at his master? That they did so purely for fun is a cheap rationalization; the official position, the recognized costume, the coxcomb and bladder, emblems of fertility, and the immunity from reprisal or punishment, all mark out the fool as a holy man. We learn that in 1317, when King Edward II was keeping Pentecost at Westminster, a woman disguised as an "histro" rode into the palace and delivered an insulting letter to the king. The doorkeepers, when blamed, said that it was against the royal custom to deny admission to any "minstrel" upon such a solemn occasion.¹ It would seem that on holy days fools were particularly sacred.

The idea of Falstaff as a holy man may seem absurd, and he is, of course, a compound character, but that Shakespeare had at the back of his mind the idea that Falstaff was a holy man is suggested by his death. "Nay, sure, he's not in hell; he's in Arthur's bosom, if ever man went to Arthur's bosom. 'A made a finer end and went away, an it had been any christom child . . . a babbled of green fields."² It seems clear that Shakespeare intended him to die in the odour of sanctity, and, while it would be dangerous to stress Arthur in this connection, the sanctity seems pagan rather than Christian.

And what did Falstaff do when alive? For the most part he got drunk, and then uttered wise saws in a whimsical manner. This suggests that he, or rather his prototype, was a soothsayer or prophet. A soothsayer or prophet is a person who, when in a state of religious

¹ E. K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, vol. i, p. 44.

² *King Henry V*, Act II, Scene iii.

ecstasy, usually induced by some intoxicant or narcotic, discloses things which are hidden from the people at large. But that was not his original function, since knowledge of things unseen, even knowledge of the future, was in pre-racing days of little real value. If custom and circumstance mould your life, and you marry, sow, or fight as they dictate, and never otherwise, there is little point in knowing what the result of your actions will be. The original function of the prophet was not to foretell what was going to happen, but to ensure, by the appropriate ceremonies, that what was wanted to happen should happen. The appropriate ceremonies included, as in many parts of the world they still include, the use of intoxicants or narcotics to put the prophet into a proper condition for prophesying.

The story of Balaam contains no mention of intoxicants, but the scene of his meeting with the angel is laid in a vineyard, and his first being unable and then able to see the angel suggests some kind of trance. At any rate we see clearly the function of a prophet: "Come "now therefore, I pray thee," says Balak, "curse me "this people . . . peradventure I shall prevail."¹ Balaam is to perform the proper ceremonies, which include sacrificing on seven altars, and is then to prophesy the defeat of the Israelites. This will enable Balak to defeat them, for he knows that no king can gain a victory unless that victory has been properly prophesied.

We are told that among the ancient Arabs the menaces which the poet-seer hurled against the foe were believed to be inevitably fatal, and that their pronunciation was attended by peculiar ceremonies, such as anointing the hair on one side of the head, letting the mantle hang down loosely, and wearing only one sandal. The ancient Irish poet possessed similar powers. "The Irish *glam dichenn*, like the "Arabic *hija*, was no mere expression of opinion, but "a most potent weapon of war, which might blister an

¹ Numbers xxii, 6.

fortunes must be such as to afford pegs upon which the myths can be hung.

Thirdly, the miracles which the myths contain will be attributed to the historical character if, when the myths are first attached to him, the possibility of such miracles is still believed in; otherwise they will be omitted.

The first two of these rules follow from the conclusions reached in previous chapters, and indeed should be fairly obvious. It should, however, be noted that this association of myths with historical characters is literary and not popular. There is no evidence that illiterates ever attach myths to real persons. The mythical stories told of English kings and queens, Alfred and the cakes, Richard I and Blondel, Queen Eleanor and Fair Rosamund, Queen Margaret and the robber, and so on, seem to have been deliberately composed; a well-known character and an old story were considered more interesting when combined. "Even from very early times," says Professor Nicoll,¹ "there had been a tendency in the morality to substitute for a pure abstraction some typical and well-known royal figure. Bale's *King Johan* is a good example of this."

As regards the third rule, I cannot find that anyone has studied the attribution of miracles to real people. Miracles fall into two classes—those which people believe to be possible in their own times, and those which they believe to have taken place only at certain periods in the past. There is nothing natural in the belief in miracles; people have to be taught to believe in them just as they have to be taught everything which is not patent to the senses. The idea that a stupid and ignorant person will necessarily believe in were-wolves or magic swords is quite baseless. A miracle is a phenomenon which can be produced, on the appropriate occasions, by gods and sacred personages, but never by ordinary people. Early man, however, knew nothing of gods or sacred personages. No doubt he

¹ Op. cit., p. 164.

was often surprised at occurrences of which he had no experience, but mere surprise does not lead to a belief in miracles; it has first to be combined with certain definite religious beliefs. A miracle, as we have seen, is not any wonder, but a particular type of wonder, that is, a ritual wonder, and it must have needed a long and intensive subjection to ritual influences before people learnt to believe that the ritual transformation of a man into a wolf was a real transformation.

The history of the Devil affords an interesting example of this process. Originally, it would seem, he was a ritual character who wore the horns of a bull or goat, probably the divine king in his capacity as the promoter of fertility. Later, apparently, the horns came to stand for the old king, their actual wearer, as opposed to the new king, their future wearer, and so the Horned Man became the antagonist of the Hero. Eventually he stepped out of the ritual into real life, and became, what to millions he still is, a figure far more real than any historical character has ever been to anyone.

The date at which the life of a saint was written can be judged by the part played in it by the Devil. Many of the early saints are purely mythical; their lives are nothing but hero myths with the sacred marriage left out. Later we get lives of saints who were real persons, into which encounters with the Devil and other mythical features have been introduced, but it is quite untrue to say that such incidents gather naturally about them. They have been introduced deliberately in order to make the stories conform to what at the time was regarded as the correct type. But whereas the utmost that can be allowed to a modern saint are limited powers of supernatural healing, encounters with supernatural beings are still tolerated in the lives of ancient saints.

The same tendency is to be seen in Shakespeare. In plays such as *Macbeth* or *The Tempest*, staged in remote regions or long-past ages, the hero's familiar, Hecate or Ariel, may appear and disappear miracu-

lously, since the audience was prepared to accept miracles under such conditions. But Prince Henry could not convincingly have been given an attendant sprite; Falstaff, though as mythical as Hecate or Ariel, is very much more solid.

I have dealt at length with Prince Henry and Falstaff because the myths are familiar and the facts readily accessible, but a study of any hero to whose name myths have become attached would show the clear-cut line which separates the historical hero from his mythical namesake. "From the researches of J. Bédier upon "the epic personages of William of Orange, Girard "de Rousillon, Ogier the Dane, Raoul de Cambrai, "Roland, and many other worthies, it emerges that "they do not correspond in any way with what historical documents teach us of their alleged real proto-types."¹

"All history," said Dr. Johnson, "so far as it is not "supported by contemporary evidence, is romance."² This is perfectly true, since romance is often myth in disguise, and if historians, instead of telling us what, in their opinion, is "not improbable," were to bear it in mind, and consider carefully the channels by which any alleged fact has been or could be transmitted, we should less often find myth masquerading as history.

NOTE.—Professor Hocart, though in general agreement with my views, disagreed with my explanation of the clown. "The clown," he said, "is the earth-cousin of the sky-king, and so does everything topsy-turvy."

¹ A. van Gennep, op. cit., p. 173.

² J. Boswell, *A Tour to the Hebrides*, p. 335.

PART III

DRAMA

CHAPTER XX

THE BASIS OF DRAMA

IN the previous parts of this book I have attempted to show that traditional narratives are never historical; that they are myths, and that a myth is a story told in connection with a rite. In the following chapters I shall attempt to show that it is the dramatic features of ritual which give rise to the myth, that is, to the traditional narrative, and that all, or at any rate most, traditional narratives show, by their form and their content, that they are derived neither from historical fact nor imaginative fiction, but from acted ritual, that is to say, ritual performed for the benefit of, and in the presence of, a body of worshippers who take either no part in it, or a very small part. Ritual performed in this way may be described as dramatic ritual or ritual drama. There can be little doubt that all drama is derived originally from ritual drama, but before discussing ritual drama let us first decide what we mean by the word "drama."

When we say that an incident is "dramatic," we mean that it resembles the incidents which we are accustomed to see represented on the stage, but differs from the normal incidents of life. We imply that what happens in real life is seldom dramatic. I would go further, and say that what happens in real life is never really dramatic, that is to say, that it is never really like what is represented on the stage.

It is often said that the best plays are those which most nearly resemble real life, and to say that scenes or incidents represented on the stage are artificial is

generally held to be a severe condemnation. As a fact, however, nothing like real life ever has been, or ever could be, represented on the stage. There are three rules which apply to all dramatic performances. They are:—

- (1) Everything said or done upon the stage must be clearly audible or visible to the audience.
- (2) Everything said or done upon the stage must be related to the plot or main theme of the drama.
- (3) The interest of the audience must never be allowed to flag.

When we say that a situation is dramatic we imply that these rules have been observed, but in real life they never are. Nothing has ever happened in real life that, if presented on the stage exactly as it happened, would hold the attention of an audience for half an hour. The difference between a play which is regarded as realistic and one which is not, is that while in the latter there is nothing which bears any resemblance to real life, in the former the actors say and do what real people might conceivably say and do, but they say and do in a couple of hours interesting and exciting things which in real life would take weeks or months. All the dull things which happen in between are left out; we spend most of our time in working, eating, sleeping, washing, and dressing and in talking about them when we are not doing them, but the actors in drama seldom do any of these things, or even mention them. The reason for this is that even in the most realistic drama the actors are not really attempting to imitate real life; they are acting a drama, and must conform to the conventions of the drama. Their utterances, their facial expressions, their actions, and their gestures must be highly artificial if they are to be clearly heard and seen from the gallery; even their whispers must be audible to hundreds. When making love or quarrelling the actors must take care to face, or half face, the audience; on the stage it is quite in order for the whole Court to

turn their backs upon the king. One glance at the photograph of a dramatic scene is enough to assure us that it is not a scene from real life.

And not only is the manner of the drama totally different from that of real life, but the plots are like nothing that really happens. In a drama the leading characters must be the same throughout, and the incidents must follow each other in a connected sequence; everything must work up to a climax. How different are our own lives as we look back upon them from the life of a hero of drama! In our case everything, or at least everything that might be considered interesting, is completely disconnected. The failure of our first love-affair drove us to thoughts of suicide, but we have now forgotten the girl's married name. The man with whom we had that terrible row—last year we saw a notice of his death in the newspaper, and were mildly interested. The place where we lived and worked for years, and which held everything that made life worth living, is now a memory which grows daily fainter. It is the same with any historical character; he can be brought into drama only by means of a purely fictitious continuity of action. To revert, for example, to the subject of the last chapter, we find that Shakespeare causes the defeat of Scrope's rebellion to be announced to King Henry IV on his deathbed, though it really took place eight years earlier.¹ But the important feature of the scene is the myth of Prince Henry's trying on the crown. We are so much accustomed to getting our history from dramas and romances that we find it difficult to realize that the historical drama is little more than a combination of fiction and pageantry.

The characters of the drama, even when they are given historical names, are not individuals but types. This is essential, in order that their idiosyncrasies, both of appearance and character, may be instantly recognized by the audience. Real people are seldom, if ever, sufficiently distinguished in appearance, and

¹ *King Henry IV, Pt. II, Act iv, Scene iv.*

sufficiently consistent in conduct and expression. The arts of caricature and satire consist in giving a quasi-dramatic character to real people by exaggerating their idiosyncrasies.

The point of all this is that when we say that a story is dramatic, we mean that the characterization is well marked, that the dialogue is pertinent, that the interest is sustained, and that everything works up to a climax; we mean, in other words, that it is something very different from a description of scenes from real life.

It is this dramatic quality which is characteristic of the traditional narrative, whatever form it may take, and which affords us a further proof, or at any rate further evidence, that the traditional narrative is not drawn from real life. The dramatic character of the Tale of Troy is noted even by those who believe it to be based on history. Thus Mr. T. W. Allen, who supposes, though without any evidence to justify the supposition, that a chronicle of the siege of Troy was kept by the bards, considers that "our *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are two "episodes as arranged by Homer out of the chronicle ". . . they are dramatized."¹ Dr. Pickard-Cambridge, discussing the dithyrambs of Bacchylides, which deal almost entirely with incidents in the Trojan and Theban cycles, observes that "it is noticeable also how "large a proportion of the poems is occupied by "speeches in the first person; and though these are "woven into a narrative, they give the poems a "dramatic quality like that which Aristotle finds and "praises in Homer."²

Modern classical scholars, like Aristotle himself, may profess to be interested in historical fact, but it is really literary form which absorbs them, and which causes them to admire the dramatic. They mistake dramatic truth for historic truth through their familiarity with the former and ignorance of the latter. Historic truth is as a rule brutal, inconsequential, and apparently

¹ T. W. Allen, *Homer—The Origin and Transmission*, p. 169.

² A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy*, p. 45.

meaningless. It is therefore apt to be less interesting and far less aesthetically satisfying than dramatic truth. But the great difference between them lies in the fact that whereas historic truth is objective, dramatic truth is subjective, that is to say, it is subject not to conditions imposed by external necessity, but to its own conventions. The villain of the drama meets with "poetic justice," for such is the convention, but the villain of real life too often dies in the odour of sanctity.

Had the Tale of Troy been a true tale, that is to say, the account of historical facts, the siege would have been brought to an end within a few weeks, either by the defection of the Greek army, by an epidemic of dysentery which carried off the leading warriors, or by the storming of Troy, in which Helen was murdered for the sake of her ear-rings by some nameless Greek. It is of such episodes that true history consists, but from the dramatic point of view they are untrue, since they further no plot and bring out no characterization.

We may conclude, then, that the Tale of Troy has a dramatic and not an historical basis, since it exhibits all the characteristics of drama—we shall discuss more of them presently—and none of the characteristics of history. The same applies to all the traditional tales which we considered in the earlier chapters. Incidents from the Tale of Troy were, of course, drama to the Athenians of the fifth century B.C., and many stories from Teutonic or Celtic tradition are drama to us, in the form, for example, of Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelungs*, his *Tristan and Isolde*, and Boughton's *The Immortal Hour*. And these stories are readily transformed, in my view retransformed, not only into drama, but into that form of sung drama which we call opera, which requires its plot to be simple and dramatic even more than does the spoken drama, and is therefore even further from real life.

Shakespeare's so-called "histories" are not really historical. When we examine them, we find that the dramatic effect is produced either by the introduction

of fictitious characters, or of incidents and dialogues for which there is no historical warrant. Even then the dramatic effects are far less successful than in such plays as *Hamlet* and *Othello*, in which the dramatist is completely untrammelled by considerations of historicity.

Of the sagas,¹ Professor Ker notes that the best passages are the most dramatic;² in other words, those passages which give the greatest satisfaction to the reader are those furthest removed from real life. Olrik says of *Loki's Wrangling* (*Lokasenna*) in the *Elder Edda* that it is "a short—we may say a dramatic"—poem," and notes that the dialogue form affords "a possibility of imparting more tension to the action "than is possible in the ordinary heroic lay."³

Dialogue is the essence of drama, and wherever we find dialogue we may suspect a dramatic origin. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that there is no such thing as a recorded dialogue between historical persons. The nearest approaches to it are perhaps to be found in Boswell's conversations with Dr. Johnson and Lord Stanhope's conversations with the Duke of Wellington; the latter, although the author tells us that he always made a record the same day, or at latest the next, are little more than scraps and paraphrases, and although Boswell was "very assiduous in recording" Dr. Johnson's conversation, not much more can be said of that; from neither would it be possible to produce anything resembling those dramatic dialogues which figure so prominently in traditional narratives, and are so often accepted as historical.

One of the largest of recent biographies is Mr. Winston Churchill's *Marlborough*; the correspondence is voluminous, but anyone who wished to learn how the Duke expressed himself in conversation would be disappointed. Nor do we find any conversation in the writings of the great diarists; Pepys and Evelyn often report the gist of conversations, but never the words. Snatches of conversation are occasionally reported in

¹ W. P. Ker, *Epic and Romance*, p. 202.

² Op. cit., p. 155.

the abundant political and diplomatic correspondence of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but these are intended to emphasize particular points in the case that the writer is trying to make; the edifying repartees which the religious apologists put into the mouths of their martyrs must be regarded with suspicion.

Going further back, we find a good deal of dialogue in *Froissart*, but *Froissart* was a romancer as well as a chronicler, and most of his dialogue, with its sententious politeness, suggests the study rather than the camp or the battlefield. He is also most conversational where he is least reliable; in the story of the burghers of Calais, for example, we are given the alleged actual words of the King, the Queen, Sir Walter Manny, and the burgesses, yet the story, although it has been accepted by many historians, is probably fictitious. It is not mentioned by those who wrote nearest to the date, and there are other circumstances which led M. Levesque¹ to regard it as poetic embroidery.

It is impossible to go through all the earlier chronicles, but it may be mentioned that there is no dialogue in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and the little that is to be found in Henry of Huntingdon is in those of his stories which are the most remote from probability.

The point of the foregoing is not to suggest that no writer ever recorded a remark made by a king or other distinguished person; nothing seems more likely than that this should have been done. The surprising thing is that there is so little to be found which can even be claimed as genuine. If the conversations of eminent persons were really remembered, handed down orally, and eventually recorded, as those maintain who allege the historicity of, for example, the Book of Genesis, the *Iliad*, and the Icelandic sagas, there should then be in existence, in one form or another, a vast literature of the utterances of such persons as King Alfred, William the Conqueror, and Richard I, even if three-quarters of what was remembered were never written down,

¹ Quoted in T. Johnes, *Froissart's Chronicles*, vol. i, p. 188 n.

and of what was written down three-quarters were lost. The point is not that what there is is probably mythical, but that there is so little which can even put in a claim to historicity. I doubt very much whether all the words which have been put into the mouths of all the kings of England from the earliest times to the year 1500, if they were put together, would amount to the length of the shortest Icelandic saga, since even in the mythical stories of the kings direct speech plays but a minor part.

In this they differ from the genuinely traditional narrative in all its forms, as well as from the Greek hero-tales and Norse sagas, which, as we have seen, are partly traditional and partly literary. In ballads and fairy-tales the "marked preference for direct 'speech,'" which Ridgeway¹ found in the Homeric poems, is equally marked. I have taken a number of ballads at random, and found none of which dialogue does not make up at least half. In many the dramatic form is pretty obvious: "It must be noticed that this 'ballad, with its three persons, and these couplets of 'question and reply, is really a little drama,'" says Andrew Lang.² He is speaking of the French ballad of *Le Roi Renaud*, of which there are variants in Italy and Scotland, but the same applies to ballads generally. The Welsh triad dealing with the meeting of Arthur and Tristram was, according to Sir John Rhys,³ intended to be sung to music. The three characters, Arthur, Drystan, and Gwalchmai, utter in turn verses of which the first two lines are a kind of refrain, and the third carries on the action of the "little drama." It was, in fact, a kind of cantata.

Many ballads are quasi-historical, and the determined Euhemerist could no doubt get history out of them, as he does out of the sagas. The sagas, as we have seen, are novels based on ballads, and the ballads, like the myths, the epics, and the fairy-tales, all, as I shall try to show, originate in the ritual drama.

¹ *Dramas and Dramatic Dances*, p. 154.

² *Folk-Lore*, vol. i, p. 108.

³ *The Arthurian Legend*, p. 380.

CHAPTER XXI

THE LANGUAGE OF THE DRAMA

THE dialogue is, as we have just seen, an essential feature of the drama, but it is by no means the only form of expression by which the traditional narrative betrays its dramatic origin. In this chapter I shall deal with four others.

We find, in the first place, that the characters, whatever their supposed nationality, all speak the same language.

Secondly, we often have detailed accounts of incidents and conversations which are supposed to have taken place in secret or in solitude.

Thirdly, we find that introductions, prophecies, and boasts are characteristic features.

And fourthly, the characters are often represented as speaking in verse.

On the English stage, of course, all the characters speak English. In the folk-play there is a character who is supposed to be a Turk, but it never occurs to anyone that Turks speak Turkish. In this, as in all other respects, the "folk" follow the example of the educated; we all listen without surprise to Julius Caesar speaking Elizabethan English, and so soaked are we in the dramatic conventions that many people quote the words of Shakespeare as if they were actually the words of Caesar. We realize, however, that while Caesar is a dramatic character who speaks English, he was also an historical character who spoke Latin. Like King Henry V, and every other historical character who has been dramatized, he exists for us as a kind of dual personality, of which one or other aspect is uppermost in our minds, according as they are at the moment more occupied with history or with drama.

But no one, I suppose, has ever imagined Sir Andrew Aguecheek as an Illyrian or Autolycus as a

Czech, or has wondered whether Hamlet's speeches were originally written in runes; whatever their titular country, period, and language, their real home is the stage, their period the day on which they are acted, and their language English. They are characters in the drama, and apart from it have no existence.

We find the same phenomenon in the *Iliad*. Hector and Kassandra are in theory Asiatic foreigners, yet their names are Greek, their manners and customs are Greek, and their language is Greek. "But allowance "must here be made," says Dr. Leaf,¹ "for poetic "needs; these prescribed free communication by speech "between both parties, and it is certainly not possible "to deduce from this that Achaians and Trojans "spoke the same language." Sir Andrew Aguecheek's use of English does not, of course, prove that English and Illyrians spoke the same language, but Sir Andrew's name, his language, and his conversation show that Shakespeare did not seriously intend to represent him as a foreigner. Similarly, everything that we are told of Hector shows quite clearly that the composers of the *Iliad* did not seriously intend to represent him as a foreigner. And there was no reason why they should; the Illyrians of Shakespeare's time were foreigners, but the Trojans of Homer's time, whenever we suppose that to have been, were Greeks. The Greeks may have known that Troy was once a non-Greek city, just as Mycenae was a non-Greek city, and as we know that London was once a non-English city. But just as "Londoner" means Englishman to us, so "Trojan" must have meant Greek to the Greeks of the seventh or sixth century B.C. An allied Greek army might attack Troy, just as an allied Greek army might attack Thebes, but this would not make the Trojans any more than the Thebans foreigners. This attitude may have changed when Troy, and all Asiatic Greece, had become part of the Persian Empire, and considerable alterations may have been made in the text of Homer after this date, but the main lines of the story were

¹ *Troy*, p. 343.

undoubtedly laid down before, at a time when the idea of a war on equal terms between Greeks and barbarians, or Europeans and Asiatics, must have been inconceivable. It was based on a dramatic ritual in which the hero's antagonist was just as much a Greek as the hero himself.

After the Potiphar's wife incident in the myth of Bellerophon, Proetus sends Bellerophon off to Lycia with a letter to the king, his father-in-law, asking the latter to have him murdered. This form of letter was perhaps as well known in classical Greece as in India at the much more recent period when the poet tells us that:—

“I sent my Kitmutgar once with a note unto the beak:—
“Please give the bearer half-a-dozen lashes for his cheek.””¹

It is difficult to believe, however, that at any time at which Bellerophon can be supposed to have lived, even if writing was in use, kings would have written to each other in this style, even if they understood each other's language. Ridgeway² accepts the story as proof that a letter written in Argolis could be read in Lycia, but it was probably a stage device, capable of being used with great dramatic effect. The myth seems to be a combination of the Potiphar's wife incident with the David and Uriah story, both of which have a wide range. It is the latter with which we are here concerned; we find a king of Munster sending his son over to Scotland with a request for his immediate decapitation carved upon his shield,³ and a similar incident occurs in *Hamlet*,⁴ where the hero sails for England, accompanied “by letters conjuring to that effect, the present “death of Hamlet.” David, of course, sends his instructions to Joab to “set Uriah in the forefront of the “hottest battle”⁵ in writing, but that a letter is not an

¹ Aliph Cheem, *Lays of Ind.*, p. 149.

² *Early Age of Greece*, vol. i, p. 209.

³ W. G. Wood-Martin, *Pagan Ireland*, p. 45.

⁴ Act ii, Scene iii.

⁵ 2 Sam. xi, 15.

essential feature of the story appears from the Mexican parallel, in which King Nezahualcoatl, in similar circumstances, gives verbal instructions to two chiefs to bring the destined victim into the thickest of the fight.¹ Ridgeway himself² gives a variant from Burma, in which the king, having fallen in love with his brother's wife, sends the brother off to suppress a fictitious rebellion, and meanwhile forcibly marries the wife.

It is to be noted that in all these stories the protagonist is a king; with the omnipresence of kings in tradition I shall deal later; there seems to me to be no doubt that these stories are from dramas of ritual origin, and it is absurd to attempt to draw from them conclusions as to the diffusion of the Greek language. Moreover, as we have seen, Ridgeway's conclusion is the opposite of Leaf's.

It is remarkable, however, that the unity of language in tradition has been so little noticed. When the champion of the Firbolgs meets the champion of the invading Tuatha de Danaan, the former is agreeably surprised to hear the latter speak good Irish.³ It was no doubt the recorder, mistaking a dramatic incident for history, who was surprised at the invader's linguistic ability. If so he must have possessed the rudiments of a critical faculty, a faculty in which most of his successors have been conspicuously lacking.

Let us now turn to the second dramatic feature of the language of tradition, the secret which is public property. We find in many traditional narratives a detailed account of incidents and conversations which, even if they had really taken place, could not possibly have been reported.

Most present-day readers are so much soaked in fiction, in novels in which the novelist describes at length what passes through his heroine's mind in the seclusion of her bedroom, that it seldom occurs to them

¹ W. H. Prescott, *The Conquest of Mexico*, vol. i, p. 168.

² *Dramas and Dramatic Dances*, p. 245.

³ Lady Gregory, *Gods and Fighting Men*, p. 4.

to ask how deeds or words performed or spoken in private came, if true, to be reported, and, if untrue, to be imagined. In the first case it is always possible, if a speech was made or a conversation took place at a court or in a council chamber, that someone who was present made notes of what was said, but it is very seldom that such a possibility is envisaged in a traditional narrative. It is not merely that there is no one there who can write, but often there is no possible listener at all. "If this is true, how came it to be 'known?'" is a question which historians might ask much oftener than they do.

If, on the other hand, what is reported in the traditional narrative is not true, why was it invented? I am not referring to simple lies, calculated to benefit the speaker or injure his enemies, but to what is known as fiction. I have already shown, or tried to show,¹ that fiction is never the result of pure imagination, but is composed from matter already present in the composer's mind. What is it, then, which has suggested to novelists and story-tellers the idea of describing what passes in the mind of another person? It is probably the dramatic soliloquy, originally a ritualistic incantation. And this explanation fits equally well the quasi-historic conversations which could not possibly have been reported. They are, in fact, merely variants of the same dramatic feature. I touched on this question earlier,² when discussing King Alfred and the cakes, and I will now give some examples in which the dramatic form is more apparent.

The account of the "Cattle-spoil of Cooley" begins with a long "pillow-talk" between King Ailill and Queen Medb.³ As a prologue to a drama, this conversation is in place; as an alleged real conversation it seems absurd. It is, however, just possible that it really took place and was reported; in the next example there is no such possibility. In another Irish tale the sons of

¹ *Supra*, p. 139.

² p. 11.

³ J. Dunn, *The Tain*, pp. 1-4.

the King of Ulster spy upon the sons of the King of Iruath. We are told exactly what was said and done, yet the latter forthwith kill the former, and then disappear for ever.¹

We can find similar examples in the sagas. In the saga of Gunnlaug Snake-tongue, Gunnlaug and another fight a lonely duel in which both are killed, yet the incidents of the duel and the conversation between the combatants are reported at length. In the saga of the Faroe Islanders the hero Sigmund Brestison is found by his enemy Thorgrim lying exhausted on the beach, where he has been thrown up by the sea. Thorgrim proceeds to murder him, but before being murdered Sigmund is supposed to relate his last adventures, including his conversations with his drowned companions, and all this is reported verbatim by the murderer.

"We can easily," says Koht,² "cut out from true history all the conversations reported from secret meetings of two particular persons. . . . Strangely enough, many modern historians have accepted such conversations as strictly historical, and still more strangely, some of them have relied upon the historicity of the account when Snorri pretends to record even the unspoken thoughts of his hero, St. Olaf." That the saga-writers were familiar with the ritual drama is improbable, but they were undoubtedly soaked in traditions derived from it.

We find similar incidents in many fairy-tales and ballads. The fairy with the goose foot, who marries a mortal but forbids him to see her at her toilet, is spied upon and her secret discovered. She recites a rhyme, whereupon her husband's castle, with all its occupants, immediately sinks into the ground, and the site is covered with water.³ In the ballad of the Demon Lover, the ship bearing him and his lass disappears into the depths of the sea, but nevertheless

¹ Lady Gregory, *Gods and Fighting Men*, p. 203.

² Op. cit., p. 134.

³ P. Saintyves, *Contes*, etc., p. 423.

we have a verbatim report of their last conversation. Similarly, in a legend of Luxembourg, the Devil, having persuaded the count's daughter to kill her father and elope with him, takes her into the middle of a river and drowns her; yet we are told what he said to her before doing so.¹

The last three examples seem to me to be clearly of dramatic origin. It is only in the drama that supernatural beings appear, and it is very rare, except in drama, for anyone to disappear suddenly and completely. The last incident would be very easy to act, and might well arise as part of a ritual drama or its derivative a morality play, but it would be impossible for anyone to imagine it to whom it had not in some such way been suggested.

As our next feature we shall take the various devices by means of which those listening to the recital of a traditional narrative are made to understand clearly what is happening and what is going to happen. These devices include the introduction, the prophecy, and the boast, and in my view all these devices have their origin in the ritual drama.

We all, I think, when we go to the theatre, fail to realize the limitations of the drama. We start by knowing that the play is a comedy, or a detective drama, or whatever it may be, and that it will be over at 11 p.m.; we have a programme on which are printed the names of the characters in the order in which they appear, and from which we learn that the final scene takes place in the hero's library. We may delude ourselves into the belief that anything might happen, but if we think it over we must realize that, apart from the law and the Lord Chamberlain, the conventions of the drama confine within very narrow limits the extent to which the dramatist may surprise us. It may be objected that these conventions arise necessarily from the conditions under which drama is performed, but this, though no doubt true in part, is by no means the whole truth, since we find similar conventions in the Attic drama,

¹ W. Edwards, *A Medieval Scrap-Heap*, p. 131.

in which the conditions of performance were very different. We find, for example, the very clearly marked division between tragedy and comedy, which did not allow that a man should come on to the stage, make some jokes, and then be killed. Such an incident would also offend against the conventions of the modern stage, yet it might be highly dramatic.

The element of surprise, both in ancient and modern drama, is confined within very narrow limits because it originally formed no part of the drama at all. The drama was originally not an entertainment but a religious ceremony, in which the whole community, or at any rate all the initiated, took part. Since the successful performance of any ceremony depends upon its being performed as it has always been performed, and since any hitch or disturbance is believed to impair, if not to destroy, its efficacy, it is essential that all the participants should understand exactly what is going to be done. And there is a further factor; the ceremony is intended to produce certain results, and the method generally adopted is for the performers to assert that they are themselves achieving or about to achieve the desired result. We have already discussed this aspect of ritual;¹ the point here to be noted is that these factors in the ritual drama lead to features of which the modern theatre programme is a degenerate survival, and which appear prominently in the traditional narrative.

We need not dwell at length on the introduction, as it is a feature of genuine history as well as of tradition. In its simplest form it is seen when a character comes on saying, "Here comes I, old Beelzebub," or when the entrance of a new character is announced by those already on the stage: "Who comes here? The worthy thane of Ross." In the sagas the characters are not merely introduced when they first appear, but are also, if they manage to avoid being killed, dismissed when they leave the stage: "And now Thorarin is 'out of the story.'

¹ *Supra*, p. 158.

In ballads we find a form of introduction which is clearly dramatic:—

“Now whether are ye the queen hersell, (For so ye well might be,)
 “Or are ye the lass of Lochroyan, seeking Lord Gregory?”
 “Oh, I am neither the queen,” she said, “Nor sic I seem to be;
 “But I am the lass of Lochroyan, seeking Lord Gregory.”

Professor Chadwick¹ notes how boastfully the heroes of the *Iliad* introduce themselves. When Idomeneus meets Deiphobus in battle he challenges him, recites his own pedigree, and continues: “But now have ships “brought me hither with consequences evil to thee, “and to thy father and to the rest of the Trojans,”² He tells the audience who he is and what part he is going to play in the drama, that is to say, he combines the introduction with the prophecy.

The prophecy is, of course, a conspicuous feature of the Homeric literature—the prophecies of Cassandra, for example, are proverbial—and it is also a conspicuous feature of all forms of the traditional narrative. But it forms no part of history. Historical characters have seldom attempted to forecast the time, place, and manner of their own or other persons’ deaths, and, we may safely say, have never succeeded except where matters were entirely within their own control. Even the most expert of politicians, financiers, or racing men seldom succeed in foretelling the future course of events, even events in their own particular line.

Prophecy, again, forms no part of the art of the novelist or story-teller. Many types of story depend for their success on a denouement unsuspected by the reader or listener, and even if the latter knows what is going to happen, he cannot without loss of interest suppose his knowledge to be shared by all the characters in the story.

Prophecy, then, in any narrative which pretends to be historical, is evidence that it is not really so, and in any narrative which is told for amusement indicates

¹ Op. cit., p. 327.

² *Iliad* xiii, p. 448.

that it had originally some other purpose. In both cases the ritual drama is indicated as the original form of the narrative.

The prophecy occupies a very prominent place in the traditional literature of Ireland, and affords one of many reasons for believing that in pre-Christian times the ritual drama played a very important part in Irish life. Let us take some examples.

The fate of Cuchulainn is announced by Morann the seer as follows : "His praise will be in the mouths of all "men ; charioteers and warriors, kings and sages will "recount his deeds ; he will win the love of many. "This child will avenge all your wrongs ; he will give "combat at your fords ; he will decide all your quarrels,"¹ In Cuchulainn's last battle he throws his spear, which kills twenty-eight men. Lugaid takes up the spear and asks : "What shall fall by this spear, O sons "of Calatin ?" "A king will fall thereby," say the sons of Calatin. So Lugaid flings the spear, and deals Cuchulainn his death-wound.²

King Dermot questions his magicians as to the manner of his death. "Slaughter," says the first, "and 'tis a shirt grown from a single flax-seed, with a "mantle of one sheep's wool, that on the night of thy "death shall be about thee." "Drowning," says the second, "and it is ale brewed of one grain of corn "that thou shall despatch that night." "Burning," says the third, "and bacon of swine that never was "farrowed—that is what shall be thy dish." All of which comes to pass in a manner clearly suggesting a sacrificial drama.³

Glas fights a duel with Madan, son of the King of the Marshes, "but as it was not in the prophecy that Glas "should find his death there, it was the son of the King "of the Marshes that got his death by him."⁴

The prophecies of Merlin are a prominent feature of

¹ E. Hull, op. cit., p. 20.

² Op. cit., p. 259.

³ S. H. O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica*, p. 86.

⁴ Lady Gregory, *Gods and Fighting Men*, p. 214.

the *Morte Darthur*. To Balin he says: "Thou shalt strike a stroke the most dolourous that ever man struck . . . and through that stroke three kingdoms shall be in poverty, misery and wretchedness, twelve year." He tells King Arthur that so long as he has the scabbard of Excalibur he shall lose no blood, "though ye have as many wounds upon you as ye may have," and also "the prophecy that there should be a great battle beside Salisbury, and that Mordred his sister's son should be against him." His prophecies include that of his own fate: "I shall die a shameful death, to be put in the earth quick."¹ It is to be noted that these prophecies, however authoritatively made, never have the slightest effect upon the action. Even Merlin himself goes to his fate as if unaware of his own prophecy.² This is a universal feature, and one inconsistent with the view that the prophecy is a warning; at least it is not a warning to the actors, though it may be to the audience.

In the sagas the death of every prominent man is foretold by prophecies, dreams, and omens; his friends urge him to put off his journey or to guard himself, but he pays no attention to what they say, and goes to meet his death exactly as has been foretold.

It need hardly be said that prophecy is a familiar feature of the fairy-tale. The fairy godmother, or other supernatural being, tells the hero or heroine what will happen to them on a particular date or at a particular spot. In this, as in all other cases, the prophet is a ritual personage, and the prophecy is, or is part of, the myth, that is to say, the form of words associated with the ritual.

Not only is prophecy a prominent feature of the traditional narrative, but prophecies are often in verse. Now it will hardly be maintained that historical persons were in the habit of speaking in verse, or that it occurs naturally to a story-teller to represent his characters as doing so. All the evidence suggests that verse was originally ritual in character, and to a great

¹ *Morte Darthur*, pp. 54, 57, 44.

² *Ibid.*, p. 76.

extent it still is so ; among many peoples the only kind of verse is ritual verse, that is, verse sung or recited upon religious or ceremonial occasions, and even in modern Europe hymns, psalms, and devotional poems are better known and more widely used than any other form of verse. When these poems contain any narrative, it is a narrative connected with the ritual. The Greeks and Romans had no secular narrative poetry, and in Northern Europe all the narrative poems, before the twelfth century, are myths or romances based upon myths. It is in this century, so far as I can learn, that we find rhymed chronicles with a definitely historical basis. Of these the best known is probably Wace's *Roman de Rou*, composed c. 1170-5, which contains an account of the Battle of Hastings. Dr. Round has shown that this account, far from being derived from reliable traditions, is in part a "somewhat confused "paraphrase of the words of William of Malmesbury," and that the rest contains numerous blunders and anachronisms.¹ In this, as in every other case, the "traditional" is the historically worthless, and the fact that it is in verse form by no means adds to its credibility, since our knowledge of such poetry as deals with historical facts teaches us that a poem can never be regarded as the primary source for an historical fact ; the poem is historical only in so far as the poet derives his facts from written records. A reliable account of a battle can be made only by collating the evidence of those who witnessed its various incidents and phases, and there is no reason to suppose that any illiterate poet has ever attempted such a feat. The poems of illiterates, and often of literates too, contain narratives of combat because their ritual is dramatic, and in dramatic ritual the combat takes a prominent place. The traditional accounts of combats, from the Tale of Troy to that of Robin Hood, are either in verse or give us reason to believe that they once were. They were once, that is to say, connected with dramatic ritual.

¹ J. H. Round, *Feudal England*, p. 416.

The Irish myths, like the sagas, are in prose, but some of the most important parts, including the prophecies, are in verse. Before setting out to invade Ulster, Queen Medb consults a prophetess:—

“Tell, O Fedelm, prophet-maid, How beholdest thou our host?”

To which the answer is:—

“Crimson red from blood they are; I behold them bathed in blood.”

This is repeated five times.¹ Needless to say, the queen is not in the least affected. The prophecy is part of the ritual, and the fact that it is in verse while the rest of the myth is in prose makes this fact all the clearer.

Even when there is no prophecy the conversation in verse, whether it occurs in ballads and fairy-tales, or in pseudo-history, indicates a dramatic origin. In the story of Alfred and the cakes, which was interpolated into Asser's *Life of Alfred*, the cowherd's wife is represented as breaking into a Latin verse which may be rendered:—

“Can't you mind the cakes, man, and don't you see them burn?
“I'm bound you'll eat them fast enough as soon as it's your turn!”

The genuine incidents of Alfred's career have, of course, not been transmitted in verse.

The rhyme also plays an important part in the fairy-tale. In the widespread tale of the little man who serves the farmer until the latter gives him a hempen shirt instead of the linen one for which he had bargained, the little man is heard to sing:—

“Harden, harden, harden hemp! I will neither grind nor stamp.
“Had you given me linen gear, I would have served you many a year.”²

On the other hand, when the Cornish farmer gave the

¹ J. Dunn, op. cit., p. 15.

² J. A. Giles, *Six Old English Chronicles*, p. 60.

helpful elf a new suit of green, the latter put it on, and went off, singing:—

“Piskie fine and piskie gay Piskie now will fly away.”¹

But whatever the elf sings, the point is that somebody is always just in time to see and hear him; his departure is dramatized. Similarly, in the Rumpelstiltskin type of story, the lady who has to find out the elf's name always happens to overhear him singing it in a rhymed verse, such as:—

“Little does my lady wot That my name is Trit-a-Trot.”²

The overhearing is represented as accidental, but it is really, like the rhyme, an essential feature. They are features not of a written or spoken story, but of an acted drama.

¹ J. Rhys, *Celtic Folklore*, vol. i, p. 324.

² R. Hunt, *Popular Romances of the West of England*, p. 130.

CHAPTER XXII

AGE AND TIME

IN every drama the unity of time must to some extent be preserved. The imagined interval between the acts or scenes must not be so long that the characters in the first act could not survive until the last, and the characters themselves must not be supposed to have changed between the acts to such an extent that they cease to be readily recognizable by the audience. The observance of these two rules is almost universal on the stage to this day; on the rare occasions when they are departed from, in a play such as *Milestones*, for example, where successive generations are shown in successive acts, unity is achieved by a partial repetition of the plot with the same actors taking similar parts. Such devices are highly sophisticated and scarcely bear repetition.

These unities are far more fundamental than the arbitrary conventions which have been established at various times limiting the intervals between acts or scenes to so many hours or days. They are really essential to the drama. Let us set them out more simply:—

Rule 1.—All the characters in a drama must be contemporaries.

Rule 2.—All the characters must remain the same age throughout.

The simpler and more primitive the drama, the more difficult it would be to depart from these rules, and in the ritual drama, which deals with the fate of a particular hero or heroine, it would be impossible.

Now when we examine the traditional narrative, whatever form it may take, we find that these rules are always observed, and it seems to me that this fact supplies a strong link to the chain of reasoning which

connects the traditional narrative with the ritual drama.

Let us start with rule 1 and the Greek heroes. Hesiod tells us of the "divine generation of the Heroes, "which are called half-gods of early times over the "boundless world. Bad war and awful battle slew "them all; some at Seven-Gated Thebes, the land of "the Cadmeans, died battling about the flocks of the "sons of Oedipus; and some War took in ships over "the great gulf of the sea to Troyland for the sake of "fair-haired Helen. Where verily the end of death "clouded them round. And Father Zeus, son of "Cronos, gave them life and familiar places far away "from men, settling them at the ends of the world, far "from the immortals, and Cronos is king among them. "And there they live with hearts untormented, in the "Islands of the Blessed, beside deep eddying ocean, "happy Heroes, and the mother of corn bears to them "thrice in the year her honey-sweet harvests." So the heroes of Greece were all contemporaries, and they all died fighting. What happened after the sieges of Thebes and Troy, Hesiod neither knows nor cares, but he knows that the heroes came to life again and had a good time. Does not the account suggest a stage-manager saying to the prostrate heroes: "It's all over. "You can get up now, and supper is waiting for you "behind the stage"?

Professor Gilbert Murray quotes Hesiod with another purpose, but he has not failed to note that the heroes are all contemporaries. He says: "There is an "extraordinary wealth of tradition about what we may "call the Heroic Age. Agamemnon King of Mycenae "and Argos, Priam King of Troy, and the kings sur- "rounding them, Achilles, Aias, Odysseus, Hector, "Paris, these are all familiar household words through- "out later history. They are among the best-known "names of the world. But how suddenly that full tradi- "tion lapses into silence! The Epic Saga can tell us "about the deaths of Hector, of Paris, of Priam; in its "later forms it can give us all the details of the last

"destruction of Troy. Then no more; except a few dim hints, for instance, about the descendants of Aeneas.

"It is more strange in the case of Mycenae and Sparta. Agamemnon goes home in the full blaze of legend: he is murdered by Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, and avenged by his son Orestes: so far we have witnesses by the score. But then? What happened to Mycenae after the death of Aegisthus? No one seems to know. There seems to be no Mycenae any more. What happened in Sparta after Menelaus and Helen had taken their departure to the islands of 'the blest'? There is no record, no memory.

"... It is the same wherever we turn our eyes in the vast field of Greek legend. The 'heroes' who fought at Thebes and Troy are known; their sons are just known by name or perhaps a little more: Diomedes, Aias, Odysseus, Calchas, Nestor, how fully the tradition describes their doings, and how silent it becomes "after their deaths!"¹ We find the same phenomena elsewhere, and the explanation is, in my view, a simple one—when the drama is ended, the curtain goes down.

Peake and Fleure admit that "though tradition and the works of the chronologists hang well together, these dates do not agree with the results of archaeological research."² Ridgeway says that "we must not lightly discard the traditional chronology of Early Greece."³ But what does he mean by "traditional chronology"? There is no chronology in Homer or the other poets. It is easy to take a myth or a fairy-tale and estimate the age of the characters and the intervals between the incidents; this is all that the Greek chronologists did, and this is why their works hang well with tradition. But this, though it may be called a chronology of tradition, is not a traditional chronology.

In spite of this pseudo-chronology, we find that rule 2 was observed just as well as rule 1. Helen has a

¹ Op. cit., pp. 29–32.

² *The Horse and the Sword*, p. 73.

³ *Early Age of Greece*, vol. i, p. 109.

grown-up daughter before she elopes with Paris; indeed, at the taking of Troy she must have been, according to Jacob Bryant's calculations,¹ nearly a hundred years old. Hermione was betrothed to Orestes, who had just reached manhood, but the wedding was postponed, and it was not till thirty years later that he avenged his father and then married her. They were both, however, still in the first bloom of youth.

Professor Halliday remarks how "the wicked Poly-dectes is enamoured of the surely maturing charms "of Danae," whose son was grown up, and notes that similar improbabilities are habitually ignored in fairy-tales.²

In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus, returning to Ithaca after twenty years' absence, finds Penelope still in the bloom of youth and charm. His son, Telemachus, has just reached man's estate, that is, he is about sixteen, yet he has been the leading man in Ithaca for about eight years.

Nestor, at the beginning of the siege of Troy, is a wise and very old man. At the end of the siege he is still a wise and very old man, and he returns home and keeps on being a wise and very old man.

In Ireland, as in Greece, attempts have been made to fit the traditions to a chronology, yet who can say what happened after the death of the great heroes? Here again the characters never get any older. In Maelduin's voyage "the mother of seventeen grown-up daughters "is still young and desirable."³ The hero Finn mac Cumall performs feats of valour at a fight known as "the Little Brawl"; so do his great-grandsons, Echtach and Illann.⁴

We find the same phenomena in the Arthurian legends. All the heroes are contemporaries, and the

¹ W. L. Collins, *The Odyssey*, p. 10.

² W. R. Halliday, *Indo-European Folk-tales and Greek Legend*, p. 130.

³ A. Nutt, *The Voyage of Bran*, vol. i, p. 166.

⁴ S. H. O'Grady, op. cit., p. 382.

Britain of the legends has no past and no future. The characters, again, never grow old. Guinevere has apparently been married for some time before Lancelot's birth; he carries her off after the death of his son Galahad—when, that is, she could hardly be less than sixty.

"It is an essential character of heroic poetry," says Professor R. W. Chambers,¹ "that, while it preserves "many historic names, it gives the story modified "almost past recognition by centuries of poetic tradition. Accurate chronology too is, in the absence of "written records, impossible; all the great chieftains "become contemporaries." But whatever modifies stories cannot be tradition, since the essence of tradition is that it passes on what it receives. The great chieftains are contemporaries because they are mythical, that is to say, timeless. In Bosnian poetry, as recited by the minstrels, "the characters mentioned by "name are few in number and recur again and again "in different stories, each district having apparently a "favourite hero who is introduced as its representative "on many different occasions."² It would seem that the chieftains are not merely contemporaries, but form a regular stock company.

As an example of rule 2 in the north, I shall take the saga of *Burnt Njal*, since it is one of the latest and most highly rationalized of the sagas, and its chronology has been worked out painstakingly by Dasent, and sounds very convincing until we investigate it critically. We then see that it has no real foundation, but that the characters remain the same age throughout.

When we first meet Njal he is, according to Dasent, between thirty-five and forty, yet he is an old man, well skilled in the law, who takes no active part in life, but whom people come to consult. He remains exactly the same age till his death forty years later. His sons, when we first meet them, are, again according to Dasent, between ten and fifteen years old, but all are

¹ *Widsith*, p. 5.

² H. M. Chadwick, op. cit., p. 103.

described as strong men well skilled in arms, and all marry within the year. Forty years later they are killed, still displaying the maximum of youthful vigour and rashness, and their wives are still childless brides, without dwellings of their own. Njal and his sons are avenged by Asgrim, who is the father-in-law of one of them and who, though he is at least seventy-five, is foremost in the fight. Gunnar reaches the age of twenty-nine without a love-affair, and then falls desperately in love at first sight with the youthful charms of Hallgerd, whose second husband has been murdered fifteen years before.

Another feature of the traditional narratives is that the characters are all adults. To this there are two exceptions ; the hero or heroine may be introduced as a newborn babe in order that somebody may try to kill it or may utter prophecies about it, and may come back into the story as a youth or maiden of about the age of puberty, in order that they may embark on the series of adventures which will bring them to the throne. I have suggested the reason for this in Chapter XVII, namely, that between the rites at birth and the rites at puberty children take no part in ritual, and have therefore no part to play in the ritual drama. It would not be true to say that children never appear in traditional narratives, but their rarity can well be realized by contrasting the best-known fairy-tales, such as Blue-beard, Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty, or Sindbad and Ali Baba, even as they are edited for children, with modern children's stories, such as those of Alice or Christopher Robin. In the former class the heroes and heroines are nearly always adults, whereas in the latter they are always children.

Even when the hero or heroine appears as a child, as happens to a limited extent, as I mentioned just now, he or she is the only child in the story. It may be said that the same applies to history; but while this may be true of chronicle history, which never deals, as tradition professes to deal, with private life at all, it is certainly not true of modern historical literature,

which often contains references to and anecdotes of childhood.

But whether the hero and heroine were ever children or not, they never cease to be young. Either they meet with an untimely death, or we are told that they lived happily ever afterwards, or, like Helen, they remain permanently young. If a character is to be old, like Nestor, he must never have been young, and even if he is to be middle-aged, like Odysseus, he must be middle-aged from the start and remain so indefinitely. The reason is that they are all characters in drama; an old Helen or Hallgerd and a young Nestor or Njal are as unthinkable as an old Columbine or a young Pantaloons.

To the rule that young children never appear in the traditional narrative there is one exception, and that is the case of Heracles, and some Celtic heroes such as Cuchulainn and Llew, who either grow up at a miraculous rate, or perform feats of strength at a miraculously early age. Light is probably thrown on these by an incident in a modern Thracian folk-play. The play begins with "the entry of the old woman called "Babo" (i.e. unmarried mother) with the *liknon* containing a swaddled puppet representing a seven-month-old illegitimate baby, which she declares is "getting too big for the 'basket.'" It has developed an enormous appetite and demands a wife. One of the girls . . . is brought to the child "now grown to maturity." He is married, killed, and restored to life.¹

There is one other phenomenon in tradition connected with time, and that is the miraculous lapse of time in the Otherworld. In the usual form of the story the hero spends what he supposes to be one or more days in the Otherworld, usually in the company of a lovely lady, and finds to his astonishment, when he returns to the real world, that he has been away a corresponding number of years. This suggests the interval which is often supposed to elapse between the

¹ Quoted by E. O. James, *Christian Myth and Ritual*, p. 274.

acts of a drama, but while the idea of a lapse of time between the acts might arise from the miraculous lapse of time in the Otherworld stories, it could hardly give rise to them, since in them the change takes place not in the hero but in the audience. It is more likely to have arisen in connection with a drama performed annually. In such a drama Robin Hood, or whoever the hero was, might well come on and explain that while the audience were a year older than when he last saw them, he himself was older merely by the length of a night spent with his May Queen. I know of no evidence for such an incident, but can think of no more plausible explanation. The attribution of widespread beliefs to casual dreams or fancies must in this, as in every other, case be unhesitatingly rejected. The idea that a lobster supper may lead to a new religion, though it seems to have a considerable vogue, is quite unwarranted.

Apart from this, however, it seems clear that every aspect of age and time, as they appear in the traditional narrative, while suggesting more or less clearly a dramatic origin, affords further strong evidence to prove that these narratives have no historical basis.

CHAPTER XXIII

DRESS AND SETTING

IT is a feature of all ritual that great importance is attached to the clothes and ornaments worn by the principal actors. We see this clearly in the ritual of the Church, which, in this respect as in so many others, merely follows the example set by its predecessors. The essence of ritual is that its performance should in every way accord exactly with precedent, and the clothes of the actors therefore share the importance which attaches to all that they say and do. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that nowhere in the world is anyone allowed to take a prominent part in any ritual unless he is dressed for it.

Now whereas in history there is very seldom any mention of what anyone wore, in the traditional narrative detailed descriptions of costume often occur, and this gives us another reason to believe that traditional narratives are accounts of dramatic ritual, and have no connection with history.

We saw that all those who took part in the May Day festivities, even the King, wore Lincoln green, and this ritual costume appears in the ballads. In one of them¹ Robin Hood not only wears green cloth himself, but provides the King with a suit of it. In another ballad Robin's bride wears a gown of green velvet.²

In the sagas there are many descriptions of dress. Odin, in the *Volsunga Saga*, appears as an old, one-eyed man, bare-footed, with tight linen breeches, a cloak, and a slouched hat.³ It seems impossible to explain this description except as being that of the costume worn by the person who took the part of Odin in a ritual drama. The same applies to the goddess

¹ J. Ritson, op. cit., p. 55.

² J. Ritson, op. cit., p. 111.

³ Magnusson and Morris, op. cit., p. 6.

Hel, who, we are told, is "half blue-black and half "flesh-colour (by which she is easily recognized)."¹ She could hardly require recognition except on the stage.

There is a curious incident in the saga of *Burnt Njal*, when Njal's sons ask for help at the Thing. According to the story, Skarphedinn is one of the best-known men in Iceland, and has been attending the Thing regularly for forty years, yet four of the chief men in the island use almost exactly the same odd formula in asking who he is. We are told that he "had "on a blue kirtle and grey breeks, and black shoes on "his feet, coming high up his leg; he had a silver belt "about him, and that same axe in his hand which he "called 'the ogress of war,' a round buckler, and a "silken band round his brow, and his hair was brushed "back behind his ears."²

In the *Laxdaela Saga* we are told of Geirmund that "he was ever so clad that he wore a kirtle of scarlet "cloth and a gray cloak over all, a bearskin cap on his "head, a sword in his hand; that was a mickle weapon "and good; ivory-hilted, no silver was borne thereon; "but the brand was sharp, and rust never abode on it. "This sword he called Footbiter, and never did he let "it go out of his hand."³ From the last remark we may conclude that the tradition of the ritual drama has survived into the saga.

In the saga of Eric the Red there is a still more detailed description. We are told that there was a famine in Greenland, and that Thorbjorg, a prophetess, was summoned to ascertain when it would cease. She came, wearing "a blue mantle, which was set with "stones down to the hem; she had a rosary of glass on "her neck and a black hood of lamb-skin lined with "white cat-skin on her head, and she had a staff in her "hand with a knob on it: it was ornamented with "brass, and set with stones down from the knob:

¹ A. G. Brodeur, op. cit., p. 42.

² G. W. Dasent, op. cit., p. 219.

³ R. Proctor, op. cit., p. 85.

"round her waist she had a belt of amadou on which "was a great skin bag, in which she kept those charms "which she needed for her art. On her feet she wore "hairy calfskin shoes, the thongs of which were long "and strong-looking, and had great buttons of lateen "on the ends. On her hands she had cat-skin gloves, "which were white inside and furry." The saga goes on to tell how she was seated on a throne, furnished with a cushion of hen's feathers, and how "there was "made for her a porridge of goat's beestings, and for "her food were provided hearts of all living creatures "which were obtainable; she had a brass spoon, and a "knife with an ivory handle bound with copper, and "the point was broken off."¹ By those who believe in the historicity of the sagas we are invited to consider all these details as part of a true story of discovery and adventure, transmitted orally for about a century and a half before it was written down. It may be said that these details are "embellishments," but why should anyone embellish a true story in this way? We have here, it seems to me, a case in which the ritual framework of the sagas, elsewhere more or less thinly veiled, is clearly apparent.

This fondness for the description of ritual costumes may have been derived, like much else in the sagas, from the Irish myths, in which they are numerous. We are told, for example, that the god Manannan, son of Ler, "wore a green cloak of one colour, and a brooch "of white silver in the cloak over his breast, and a "satin shirt next his white skin. A circlet of gold "around his hair, and two sandals of gold under his "feet."²

Fiachna mac Retach of the men of the *Sid* or fairies wears "a five-fold crimson mantle, in his hand two five- "barbed darts, a gold-rimmed shield slung on him, at "his belt a gold-hilted sword, golden-yellow hair "streaming behind him."³ Another fairy who has

¹ Quoted by Gathorne-Hardy, op. cit., p. 34.

² A. Nutt, op. cit., vol. i, p. 131.

³ Ibid., p. 180.

golden hair is Midir, but Sir John Rhys tries to explain this away,¹ since it does not fit in with his theory that the fairies were real people of a small, dark race.

Of Conchobar we are told that his face was like the moon, and that he had a forked beard and reddish-yellow hair. The description goes on: "A purple-bordered garment encircled him, a pin of wrought gold fastening the garment over his shoulder. Next to the surface of his skin was a shirt of kingly satin. A purple-brown shield, with rims of yellow gold, was beside him. He had a gold-hilted, embossed sword; in his white, firm right hand he held a purple-bright, well-shaped spear, accompanied by its forked dart."² We have already seen how the description of Cuchulainn's appearance occupies a page and a half.

The Homeric poems, though derived from the ritual drama, have got a good way from it, but even in them we find descriptions of dress and equipment more detailed than occur in historical records. The shield of Achilles was probably attached to the statue of a god, and borne by the person who took the god's part at his festival; the transformation of the appearance and garments of Odysseus to those of a beggar takes place instantaneously, after the manner of the drama but not of real life.

I said at the beginning of this chapter that in history there is very seldom any mention of what anybody wore. It is difficult to prove a negative, or to be sure that one has not missed descriptions of clothing in books which one did not read with this idea in mind, but I have been unable to find any mention of what anybody wore in the works of any classical historian or of any old English chronicler, in fact of any writer before the sixteenth century and I believe that our knowledge of what was worn in earlier times is derived from pictures, statues, and brasses, and not from written descriptions of what people wore. If the traditions were simply oral chronicles, we should

¹ *Celtic Folklore*, vol. ii, p. 680.

² E. Hull, op. cit., p. 10.

expect that the practice of describing at length the dress and equipment of the leading figures would be carried further in the written chronicles, since it is obviously easier to record what was worn by a contemporary than by a person who lived some centuries before. If I am not mistaken in my facts, we have here further evidence of the gulf which divides history from tradition.

Not only does the dress of the characters of tradition suggest a dramatic origin, but so also does the setting in which we see them. The usual setting for a ritual drama is a door-way or gateway. The reason for this is probably that the ritual was originally performed at the king's palace or tomb, which was often the same place. With the centralization of kingdoms and cults, and the gradual secularization of kings, came the development of shrines, that is, buildings in which there was just sufficient imitation of the royal palace and tomb for ritual purposes. A shrine with an auditorium, that is, an area in front of it fenced to keep out unauthorized persons, becomes a temple, theatre, or church. The place where the ritual can most appropriately be performed, that is to say, where sacredness can be combined with visibility, is the entrance to the shrine, and it is there that the ritual drama is performed. The scene of the Attic tragedy is usually laid at the entrance of a palace or temple, and the medieval mystery play was usually performed at the entrance of the chancel. This explains why characters in fairy-tales and other traditional narratives are in the habit of blurting out their secrets in some gateway or doorway, where other incidents often occur that in real life would be unlikely to occur in such a situation.

Lug has a ritual dialogue with Nuada's doorkeeper, and plays chess in the doorway,¹ and the Black Book of Carmarthen contains a poetical dialogue between King Arthur and a porter.²

"We may note especially," says Professor Chad-

¹ A. Nutt, op. cit., vol. ii, p. 175.

² A. K. Chambers, *Arthur of Britain*, p. 63.

wick,¹ "the long and detailed account of Beowulf's "arrival at the Danish king's hall, and the conversation which the chamberlain holds with the king on "the one hand and the visitor on the other, before the "latter is invited to enter." "The second poem," says Professor W. P. Ker,² alluding to the *Fiolvinnsmál*, "also in dialogue, and in the dialogue measure, gives "the coming of Svipdag to the mysterious castle, and "his debate with the giant who keeps the gate."

The tragedy of Absalom's death, which strongly suggests the ritual drama, is staged in the gateway of Mahanaim, the speaking characters being David, Joab, a watchman, and two messengers.³ Another tragedy staged in a gateway is the slaying of Jehoram and Jezebel by Jehu.⁴ In both of these tragedies we have the well-known stage device by which a watchman reports to those on the stage what is happening off.

Another common feature of ritual and drama is the procession, in which, of course, the principal characters come last. Dr. Krappe⁵ notes that in ballads and fairy-tales such devices are common as "a procession will come of ladies fair in the extreme; it "is thought that the queen is among them, but we "are told that she is not; these are only her hand- "maids. Next comes a procession of women fairer "still, but again the queen is not one of them. At last "she comes herself and is a thousand times fairer "still."

When Janet is to retransform her lover, the Young Tamlane, from a fairy to a man, he tells her that she is to let the first two companies of fairy horsemen go by, and seize the third rider in the third company, which will be himself.

Cormac comes to join Queen Medb with three splendidly arrayed companies. When the first appeared, "Is that Cormac yonder?" all and everyone asked. "Not he, indeed," Medb made answer. The

¹ Op. cit., 82.

² Op. cit., 114.

³ 2 Sam. xviii.

⁴ 2 Kings i.

⁵ A. H. Krappe, op. cit., p. 182.

same happened with the second company, but the third time Medb replies, "Aye, it is he."¹

Koht notes another type of this rule of three in the sagas; "when somebody is hidden, and is to be found, "it is a rule that the search for him is to be made three "times."² The connection of the number three, and of the third time of asking, with ritual is, of course, well known, but there is no reason why it should figure more prominently in the unfettered imagination than it does in historic fact.

¹ J. Dunn, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

² H. Koht, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

CHAPTER XXIV

SHAPE-SHIFTING AND TALKING ANIMALS

A PROMINENT feature of every type of traditional narrative is the human being in animal form, or, what is in my view merely a variant, the animal that talks. That persons disguised or partly disguised as animals are an almost universal feature of ritual and ritual drama is so well known as hardly to need demonstration. Why ancient Egyptian ritual was performed largely by people wearing animal masks; why Greek gods and goddesses were often represented as animals or birds; why the Hindu god Ganesh has an elephant's head; why an African chief is invested with a lion-skin and given some such title as Great Lion; and why in modern churches we may see Christ represented as a lamb—these are questions the answer to which lies outside the scope of this work; my object here is to try to show that similar features appear in all types of traditional narrative, and afford further confirmation for the belief that these narratives are derived from the ritual drama.

It should be sufficiently obvious that human beings never really turn into animals or animals into human beings, and that animals, or at any rate quadrupeds, never talk, so that whatever else these incidents in the traditional narratives are based upon, they are not based upon fact.

The generally held view about such rites and such tales is that they arose from the inability of savage man to distinguish between animals and human beings. Thus Professor Gilbert Murray¹ speaks of "men who 'made their gods in the image of snakes and bulls and 'fawns, because they hardly felt any difference of kind 'between themselves and the animals,'" and Sir James

¹ *Bacchae*, p. 85.

Frazer assures us that "it is not merely between the "mental and spiritual nature of man and the animals "that the savage traces a close resemblance; even the "distinction of their bodily form appears sometimes "to elude his dull apprehension."¹ Such a view may be supported, as Sir James supports it, by the statements of early travellers and missionaries, but is quite untenable by anyone with any real knowledge of savage mentality. In questions which involve the weighing of evidence or the application of scientific principles the savage, like the less educated European, is often at sea, but his powers of direct observation are as good as those of the scientist. Failure to distinguish between a human being and a snake or a bull would be, among savages as among the civilized, an indication not of dull wits but of hopeless insanity. The savage may believe, as the Council of Trent believed, that people can take the form of animals, but that is very different from confusing men with animals. People in animal form are quite different from real animals; between a man and a wolf there is a great gulf fixed, and so there is between a real wolf and a were-wolf. The latter always has traits which mark it out as a human being in disguise; it is, in fact, not a real animal but a magic animal, the product not of confused thought but of superstition.

It seems probable that such superstitions arose out of the ritual. Men disguised, or partly disguised, as animals have been, from the earliest times of which we have any knowledge, familiar figures in ritual. People seeing such figures in circumstances calculated to produce the maximum of emotion and awe might well come to believe that they existed independently of the ritual. Just as we have good reason to believe that a devil was originally a man ritually disguised as a goat, and an angel was originally a boy ritually disguised as a bird, so we may well believe that were-wolves and were-leopards were originally men ritually disguised as wolves or leopards. And since men disguised as

¹ J. G. Frazer, *Golden Bough*, vol. viii, p. 206.

animals can speak, it may well come to be believed that magic animals can speak. If there is any person in the world who believes that real animals can speak, I have yet to hear of him.

In ancient Egypt it was not men but gods who changed themselves into animals. "The goddess Nut," we are told, "changed herself into a cow, and the 'majesty of Râ found himself seated upon her back.'" "Then Isis transformed herself into a *djeri* bird, the 'form which she was in the habit of taking in times of 'stress, and flew up and alighted on the top of a tree.'"

"Horus then changed his form into that of a lion "which had the face of a man, and he was wearing the "triple crown with three solar discs, three pairs of "plumes, two cabras, and a pair of ram's horns."¹ Can anyone seriously believe that the ancient Egyptians were unable to distinguish between a woman and a cow, or a man and a lion? We shall see later that these transformations undoubtedly took place in the ritual drama.

With the rationalization which begins once the traditional tale, or myth, becomes separated from the ritual, the miraculous incidents are gradually eliminated, but these animal transformations are among the last to go. Shape-shifting seems to have been expunged from the *Iliad*, but a good deal of it remains in the *Odyssey*. Athene flies off into the air like an eagle; Idothea disguises Menelaus and his companions as seals with the aid of fresh-flayed sealskins.² The latter was probably the method by which Circe originally changed the companions of Odysseus into swine.

The ass's ears of Midas, and of various Celtic kings, were probably part of a ritual costume. In the original rite which gave rise to the story of Balaam and the ass it is probable that, as in the thirteenth-century Laon Christmas play, it was "puer sub asinâ" who answered the prophet.³

¹ E. A. Wallis Budge, *From Fetish to God in Ancient Egypt*, pp. 466, 449, 479.

² *Odyssey*, ii, 310; iv, 440.

³ E. K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, vol. ii, p. 54.

The *Volsunga Saga*, which, as we saw in Chapter V, is the basis of most of the saga literature, contains a great deal of shape-shifting. "Now on a time as they "Sigmund and Sinfjotli fare abroad in the woods for "the getting of wealth, they find a certain house, and "two men with great gold rings asleep therein: now "these twain were spell-bound skin-changers, and "wolf-skins were hanging up over them in the house; "and every tenth day might they come out of those "skins; and they were king's sons: so Sigmund and "Sinfjotli do the wolf-skins on them, and then might "they nowise come out of them, though forsooth the "same nature went with them as heretofore; they "howled as wolves howl, but both knew the meaning "of that howling."¹ This passage suggests that the donning of wolf-skins, like nearly all rites, was periodical; that men who were disguised as wolves talked in a howling voice; and that were-wolves were once royal personages.

Otter, son of the rich and mighty Hreidmar, is killed by Loki in the form of an otter. The gods obtain the wherewithal to pay the blood-money by catching a dwarf who was in the form of a salmon. Fafnir, Hreidmar's elder son, kills his father for the sake of the treasure, and takes the form of a dragon, in which form he is killed by Sigurd, who is himself apparently in the form of a wolf. There is much to suggest that the whole of this story is the account of a king-killing ritual which was eventually dramatized. There seems to be no doubt that Norse kings masqueraded as animals. In an early seventh-century grave found in Sweden was a helmet on the base of which was represented a procession of warriors. The leader wears a boar's head helmet and a boar's mask, with the tusk protruding. "Here indeed," says Miss Phillpotts, "we have *Hilditorn*, the Boar-Tusk King."²

She also describes³ a Swedish play, *Staffen Stalle-dreng*, which contains a mixture of heathen and Chris-

¹ Magnusson and Morris, op. cit., p. 20.

² B. S. Phillpotts, op. cit., p. 170. ³ p. 125.

tian ideas. Staffen makes his speech mounted on his grey steed, which is composed of two youths fastened so that they are back to back. Each walks on his feet and on two sticks held in his hands, so that the horse has eight legs. We may thus understand how Odin's horse Sleipnir came to have eight legs.

Shape-shifting stories are also common in Celtic mythology. The children of Lir were changed into swans by a stroke of their wicked stepmother's wand; this is a widespread fairy-tale motive. Liban becomes a salmon and her handmaid an otter. Tuan mac Cairill was changed successively into a stag, wild boar, bird, and salmon. This brings us to the pursuit stories—Gwion, pursued by Ceridwen, becomes in turn a hare, fish, bird, and grain of wheat, while she becomes a greyhound, otter, hawk, and black hen.¹ Pursuit stories are found all over Europe, as well as in the *Arabian Nights*, and would seem to be allied to the stories of disenchantment by shape-shifting. In the ballad of Young Tamlane, the hero, before he can regain his proper shape after being enchanted, becomes in succession a snake, a bear, a red-hot bar of iron, and a burning coal. That this was a ritual procedure can hardly be doubted, and since it cannot have been carried out in reality, it must have been represented dramatically.

Of another type of story I will let Professor Saintyves² speak. "On Puss in Boots or his like," he tells us, "fox or gazelle, dog or jackal, depends not only the 'prosperity of the country, but even that of the king. 'By giving to the animal protector the rôle of ambassador, herald, and champion in the installation 'ritual of a king, one caused the latter to participate in 'the animal's powers and virtues. Besides this, the 'commentary which accompanied it, and which was 'nothing but a variant of our tale, showed clearly the 'debt which the king owed to the animal, and his 'obligation not to offend it, not only in the interest

¹ J. Rhys, *Celtic Folklore*, vol. ii, pp. 611-13.

² Op. cit., p. 490.

"of the public, but in his own interest. *Puss in Boots*" was most probably connected with the installation "ritual of the ancient priest-kings of primitive societies, "and doubtless served to recall to the sovereign the "importance of the magico-religious duties of his "office." An actual animal could obviously not have appeared, nor, since the part is an active one, would an image have been adequate, so here again we must conclude that, if Professor Saintyves is right, there was a dramatic impersonation.

An almost world-wide type of story is that in which an animal or monster is beheaded, and immediately there steps forth from its skin a handsome prince, who marries the princess and becomes king. Sometimes, on the other hand, it is a beautiful princess who steps forth. Many examples have been collected by Professor Kittredge.¹ In Gælic stories a horse, a fox, a frog, and a raven become princes or handsome young men, and a horse becomes a girl. In Ireland an old man becomes a young man, and in England a cruel monster becomes a man. In Germany three dogs become princes; in France and Norway a cat becomes a princess, and in Norway, Sweden, and Russia a horse becomes a prince. In all these cases the animal or whatever it is is beheaded, but sometimes it must be cut open or skinned. Thus in Brittany the hero kills and skins a horse, and a prince emerges; the same thing happens when the belly of a black cat, born of a woman, is ripped up. Sometimes, as in Sweden and the Faroes, the skin of the animal, kid, or ass has to be turned inside out. A Zulu prince, born in the form of a snake, gets his wife to pull the skin off, after which he appears in his true form. In Armenia a spell causes the skin of a dragon to burst and a prince to emerge.

"The belief," says Professor Saintyves,² "in the cessation of an animal metamorphosis in consequence of a wound or a beheading, a belief which is found both in the stories of were-wolves and in the tales

¹ G. L. Kittredge, *Gawaine and the Green Knight*, pp. 200, 217.

² Op. cit., p. 434.

"which have just been cited, refers, in our opinion, not "to real facts—this is quite certain—but to rituals in "which animal disguises were the rule. The faith in "were-wolves and in the sabbath, as well as in many "magical practices, is connected in part with ancient "pagan or pagano-Christian secret societies, the "members of which, during their initiation or in their "sacred ceremonies, clothed themselves in the skins or "masks of animals such as wolves, tigers, cattle, cats, "bears or hares. The violent return to human form in "certain variants of *Beauty and The Beast* impels us to "suppose that narratives of this type arose when "similar rituals were still customary. Neither must we "ignore the frequency of the employment of animal "disguises in the initiations of savages and of pagan "religions. Did not nearly all the degrees of Mithraic "initiation require animal masks?"

These disguises had no need to be complete. "In the "nursery tales of the higher races," says Hartland,¹ "the dress (which transforms the heroine into a swan, "etc.) when cast aside seems simply an article of human "clothing, often nothing but a girdle, veil or apron; "and it is only when donned by the enchanted lady, or "elf, that it is found to be neither more nor less than a "complete costume." Once the ritual and the belief have come into existence, the power of suggestion is almost unlimited, but to allege that the belief is instinctive is a very different thing. If belief in shape-shifting were natural it would be everywhere the same, instead of taking different forms in different parts of the world. It is found, however, in all forms of traditional narrative, myths, sagas, epics, ballads, and folktales, and this fact further demonstrates the absurdity of postulating a different basis for the different forms of traditional narrative. They are all, in more or less corrupt forms, descriptions of dramatic ritual.

¹ Op. cit., p. 301.

CHAPTER XXV

THE ROYAL HERO

WE have seen that in the ritual the chief part is played by the king, and in the ritual drama which arises from the ritual the chief part, if not played by the king himself, is played by a priest or actor who represents him. This explains why royalty plays such an important part in every form of traditional narrative. Royalty plays the chief part in the epic, the saga, the fairy-tale, and the folk-play because these are all derived from the ritual drama. On the commonly held view that folklore derives from the peasantry, there is no conceivable reason why all the features of village life, the festivals, the songs, the dances, and the stories, should revolve round kings and queens. The people who took part in these festivals and dances, and repeated these songs and stories, could as a rule have no acquaintance with royalty, any more than most villagers could at the present day. If they had originated their own festivals, and composed their own songs and stories, they would have used material with which they were more familiar. The vast amount of traditional material dealing with the kingship must have been evolved among people to whom the kingship ritual was not merely highly important, but thoroughly familiar.

The development of kingship ritual without the king may be due to two causes : the first is the consolidation of kingdoms, as when the heptarchy became a single monarchy, and the king's functions became increasingly secularized ; this might cause the idea of kingship ritual without a king to become familiar. The second cause would be imitation ; the tendency in all ages and all countries has been for the king and his courtiers to set fashions which all classes of the population strive to follow.

We cannot agree with Professor Karl Pearson when

he says that in the märchen "kings are as plentiful as "blackberries, because every kin-alderman and clan- "father has developed into one,"¹ since we have no reason to believe that a kin-alderman ever developed into a king, nor does the king of the märchen bear any resemblance to a kin-alderman. No more can we agree with him when he tells us² that "back in the far past we "can build up the life of our ancestry . . . the little "kingdom; the queen or her daughter as king-maker, "the simple life of the royal household, and the humble "candidate for the kingship." The king is always a sacred person, living a guarded and ceremonious life, and the candidature is always limited to those who can satisfy rigid ritual requirements. What we must rather suppose is that the king of the märchen is the king of the village drama, performing his part amid rustic surroundings and with simple properties, just as the king of the folk-drama does to this day.

The importance of the part played by royalty in the folk-play and the fairy-tale requires no illustration; the heroes of the early sagas are all kings, and though in the Icelandic sagas the heroes are not actually royal, which since there were no royalties in Iceland they could not well be, yet they are always members of the leading families, and are represented as associating on familiar terms with the kings of Norway. In all epic poems the chief characters are royalties. "The characters brought before us in the *Iliad*," says Professor Chadwick,³ "are almost invariably princes, or persons "attached to the retinue of princes, apparently of what "we may call knightly rank." And the same writer tells us that "all the women mentioned in the "Anglo-Saxon poems are of royal birth, while the "men are either princes or persons, apparently of "noble or knightly rank, attached to the retinue of "princes."⁴

These poems, like the drama itself, are derived from the ritual drama, and the belief that drama, that is,

¹ *Chances of Death*, vol. ii, p. 56.

² *On cit n 228.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁴ *Ibid n 82*

serious or tragic drama, is concerned solely with the doings of kings persisted until recent times. Among the chief features in the ritual life of a king, and the life of an early king was simply a life of ritual, were his deposition and death, and it is these which were long regarded as forming the proper subject of tragedy. Chaucer's monk says that tragedy is a story:—

“Of him that stood in great prosperity,
“And is yfallen out of high degree
“Into misery and endeth wretchedly.”

This describes the fate of most of the heroes whom we discussed in Chapter XVI.

“The tragic hero,” says Miss Bradbrook,¹ “was not ‘thought of as a human being, on the same level as the ‘other characters in the play. If he were a king, his ‘royalty invested him with special powers; and the ‘difference between comedy and tragedy was often ‘defined in this way, that comedy dealt with common ‘people and tragedy with kings and princes.’”

According to Daniello (1536), “the tragic poets ‘treat of the death of high kings and the ruin of ‘empires.” Minturno (1559) thought that tragedy concerned “those of high rank”; Scaliger (1561) says that tragedy “introduces kings and princes”; and according to Castelvestro (1576) “the actions of kings ‘are the subject of tragedy.”²

This tradition is not confined to Europe. “According to Cambodian notions, as in Burma,” says Ridgeway,³ “the principal character [of a drama] must ‘be a king, a prince, or a princess.” He also tells us that “the themes of the Cambodian drama are drawn ‘from the lives of the ancient kings, which present ‘numerous tragic reversals.”⁴

The same fact, and also the essentially dramatic character of epic poetry, have been noted by Professor

¹ M. C. Bradbrook, *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy*, p. 55.

² A. Nicoll, op. cit., p. 85.

³ W. Ridgeway, *Dramas and Dramatic Dances*, p. 265.

⁴ *Third n 264*

Ker,¹ who says that "in the main, the story of the 'Niblungs is independent of history . . . the relations "of Achilles to his surroundings, of Attila and Erman- "aric to theirs . . . are intelligible at once, without "reference to anything outside the poems. To require "of the poetry of an heroic age that it shall recognize "the historical meaning and importance of the events "in which it originates, and the persons whose names "it uses, is entirely to mistake the nature of it. Its "nature is to find or make some drama played by kings "and heroes." We may go further and say that to suppose that it originates in historical events is entirely to mistake the nature of it.

Not only must there always be a king or high-born hero in the traditional narrative, but he must always engage in a contest. In Chapter XVII I dealt with a particular type of hero, and the particular types of contest in which he engages. There are variant types of hero and of contest, but whenever the hero is represented as fighting, it is always evident that it is a staged combat and not a real battle. There is never any question of tactics or generalship; the hero never takes his adversary by surprise, nor turns the tables by bringing up reinforcements to a threatened point. All that he does is to hew his way through the ranks of the enemy until either he defeats them single-handed, or else he meets in single combat the opposing hero whom he is to kill, or by whom he is to be killed. The combatants other than the heroes never perform any feats of valour; their sole function, if they appear on the scene at all, is to fall in heaps before the hero's all-conquering sword.

In the *Iliad*, minor heroes slaughter each other, and nameless warriors fall in scores, without affecting the issue; this is decided by a single combat between Achilles and Hector, at which the opposing armies look on.

The great battle of Magh Tuireadh lasts for many days, but it is not till the last day that the superhuman

¹ W. P. Ker, op. cit., p. 23.

leaders take part in it. They then slaughter each other in single combat.¹ Cuchulainn repeatedly defeats the armies of Queen Medb single-handed; at last his death is decreed, but he can be killed only by a king, Lugaid of Munster.²

We saw that according to Nennius the 960 foemen who fell at Mount Badon were all slain by Arthur's own hand. It would seem that in his final battle with Mordred all the combatants on both sides are killed or incapacitated before he and Mordred engage; they can get their death-wounds only from each other.

In the saga battle of Dunheidi, which is supposed to be between the Goths and the Huns, the leaders are Angantyr and his nephew Hlodver. The battle goes on for nine days and thousands are killed; on the tenth day the leaders meet in a long-drawn-out duel in the midst of the battle, and when at length Angantyr kills Hlodver, the battle promptly ceases.³

"In *Roland*," says Professor Ker,⁴ "the fighting, 'the separate combats, are rendered in a Homeric 'way.' That is the way of the ritual drama, and not the way of historic fact. Professor Chadwick⁵ tries to explain these single combats by supposing that the possession of armour constituted an overwhelming advantage, and that the object of the battle was to kill the leaders, who were expected to distinguish themselves by personal bravery. The same conditions would apply to feudal times, yet feudal monarchs never performed such feats. Many of them are reported to have performed acts of personal bravery, and King Edward III is said to have challenged the King of France to single combat, but I have been unable to find any occasion on which rival kings or leaders actually met. Shakespeare, indeed, represents King

¹ Lady Gregory, op. cit., pp. 55-9.

² E. Hull, op. cit., p. 259.

³ *Hervarar Saga*, quoted by P. B. du Chaillu, *The Viking Age*, vol. ii, p. 447.

⁴ W. P. Ker, op. cit., p. 294.

⁵ Op. cit., p. 339.

Henry IV as fighting a single combat with Douglas, but this is quite unhistorical.

An interesting example of the traditional battle as a ritual drama is afforded by the description of *Ragnarok*, the destruction of the gods, in the *Prose Edda*.¹ We are told that "Odin rides first with the gold helmet "and a fair birnie," and later that "Thor shall put to death the Midgard Serpent, and shall stride away "nine paces from that spot; then shall he fall dead to "the earth." The adversaries of the gods included, besides the Midgard serpent, the Fenris wolf and the dog of Hel; it would seem that there was a procession of men dressed as the gods, and then a battle between them and men in animal masks. The mention of nine paces shows how meticulously the parts were laid down, and the fact that the future tense is used shows how little difference there is between a prophecy and a stage direction. In this, as in all other traditional battles, there is no concerted fighting; each god fights a duel with a monster.

The single combat which the hero fights is not an isolated phenomenon, but follows from the general rule which prescribes that he shall perform all his feats and all his journeys alone. Of course no real potentate ever acts in this way; no king or prince, feudal lord, Arab sheikh, or savage chief has ever left his palace, castle, camp, or village, for any purpose whatever, without at least two or three retainers. What chiefly distinguishes kings and rulers from ordinary men, both civilized and savage, is that the former are always closely attended. This applies not merely to royalty, but to such substitutes for royalty as governors, judges, and mayors. A royalty as a solitary figure is even more difficult to conceive; anyone attempting to describe the activities of such a person, whether real or imaginary, could hardly fail to represent him as surrounded or followed by guards and attendants.

Yet the hero of tradition is usually alone. We find him miles from the nearest habitation, often with a

¹ Tr. A. G. Brodeur, p. 79.

sword, sometimes with a horse, but never with any spare clothing or any provisions for the journey. His lack of provision never causes comment, though his loneliness is explained in various ways. A solitary journey through desolate country, connected with and usually leading up to a single combat, is, however, a normal feature of a hero's career.

Let us take some examples. Robin Hood, though he has a large band of adherents, spends much of his time wandering alone through the forest, seeking out the single combats in which he is usually worsted. Sigurd, having killed Fafnir and Regin, performs a long journey alone, with a vast treasure loaded on to his horse. Cuchulainn travels in a chariot, and must therefore have a charioteer; accompanied by him alone, he makes many journeys through desolate country, and fights a number of single combats.

Malory wrote at a time when no archer went to war unaccompanied by a servant, and he often mentions squires, yet we repeatedly find the leading heroes, and even King Arthur himself, riding alone through the forest to their single combats.

Going back to ancient Greece, we find various heroes who travel alone because they ride supernatural steeds. Leaving them aside, we may note that Heracles travels all over the Western world, and fights monsters of all kinds, accompanied by nothing but a club and a lion-skin. Odysseus, having lost all his companions at sea, travels through the wilds of Ithaca to attack single-handed his wife's suitors. Oedipus is travelling alone when he meets and kills his father, King Laius, who is accompanied only by a charioteer. Theseus had an easy voyage from Troezen to Athens by sea, yet he chooses to walk a hundred miles alone, and apparently without even a wallet, through what appears as desolate country, though it was really the most populous part of Greece. He has several single combats *en route*.

Jacob carries things even further. The son of a wealthy sheikh, who has many herdsmen and slaves,

he sets forth on a journey of five hundred miles to obtain a bride, alone and on foot, and with no provision for the journey. The first day, apparently, he covered sixty miles before sunset, going via Hebron and Jerusalem, but he did not stay at any town or village, but lay down supperless upon a stone. His single combat with "God" took place on the return journey.

We are told nothing of Moses' journey after he killed the Egyptian, but he must have crossed two hundred miles of desert, apparently alone and on foot, till he, like Jacob, found a bride beside a well.

None of these incidents is altogether impossible, and a plausible case for any one of them can be made by a Euhemerist, especially if he is "allowed to tell the story "as it more probably happened."¹ It is not until we compare these stories with each other, and with recorded facts on the one hand and folk-tales on the other, that their real nature becomes apparent. In almost every folk-tale there is a future king (or queen) who performs a solitary journey, and it is with these, and not with the princes of history, that the affinity of our traditional heroes rests. The only king on record who roams alone in the woods is the "king of the "woods" at Nemi, and he is not a real monarch, but a ritual survival. The impossibility of fitting our heroes into any historic setting has been tacitly recognized by the creation of an "Heroic Age" and a "Patriarchal "Age" in which to place them.

There can be little doubt that the scene of the solitary journey and single combat is the stage. They are the features numbered 10 and 11 in the career of our typical hero, and we saw in Chapters XVI to XVIII that these features are all features of ritual. Now ritual, especially royal ritual, is an essentially public affair; even if the whole community is not allowed to be present, there are always many officials, initiates, or other privileged persons who may or must attend. The

¹ A. Weigall, discussing Abraham in *A History of the Pharaohs*, vol. i, p. 319.

hero must perform his feats alone, since it is by them that he demonstrates his fitness for the throne; he must perform them in public, since the public, or the required portion of it, must be satisfied as to his fitness. This result is attained by placing the hero on a stage or within an enclosure where he is separated from the spectators, but in full view and hearing of them. If we wish to see how a hero can fight a single combat with a monster, in the heart of a desolate forest, but within full view of hundreds of spectators, we need only witness a performance of Wagner's *Siegfried*. The scenic accessories of the ancient ritual drama, on which the hero stories were founded, were, however, less realistic in all probability than the pasteboard trees against which one sees the conductor's silhouette.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE SPIELMAN

IN Reinhard's wonderful production, *The Miracle*, the incidents of which are traditional and clearly derived from the ritual drama, there is a character called the "Spielman." He appears in a different guise in each act, but it is he who initiates each dramatic development, and who goads the other characters into action. The action into which he goads them always leads to their own ruin, but without his stimulation it does not appear that there would be any action at all. His rôle, though ostensibly that of a minor character, is really that of prompter and stage-manager.

In *Faust* we find a similar phenomenon. Here Mephistopheles, though he himself plays no part in the drama, is the motive-power behind the other characters. Mephistopheles is the Devil, and the reason why he is the Devil seems clear. The ritual was very ancient and very popular; the Church was unable to suppress it, though the actions which the hero had to perform, such as killing a man and carrying off his daughter, were regarded as highly immoral. The result was a compromise, by which the hero was permitted to perform the requisite actions, but they were to be regarded as having been inspired by the Devil, and were to incur the appropriate penalty.

This attitude seems to have been foreshadowed in late pagan Scandinavia. "Among the gods," says Professor Gronbech,¹ "Loki occupies a place of his own. His part in the sacred drama is that of the plotter who sets the conflict in motion and leads the giants on to the assault that entails their defeat. His origin and *raison d'être* are purely dramatic; like his confrères in other rituals and mythologies he is a child of the 'games,' and herein lies the cause of his

¹ Op. cit., p. 255.

"double nature. As the wily father of artifice whose "office is to drag the demoniacal powers into the play "and effect their downfall, he comes very near representing evil . . . but as the sacred actor who performs a necessary part in the great redemptory "work of the *blot* [sacrifice], he, i.e., his human impersonation, is a god among gods, beneficent and inviolable."

This equivocal character of Loki may be due in part to Christian influence, since in some at least of the earlier sagas it is Odin who appears as the Spielman, and he incurs no odium whatever, though he urges the heroes on to courses which bring them to misfortune and death. In the *Volsunga Saga* his machinations lead to the death of the heroes and all the principal characters, and not only does he appear from time to time to spur on the characters, but he is brought on, in his cloak and slouch hat, to speak the prologue and epilogue. In the story of Harald Hilditonn he takes the place of Harald's charioteer and sows discord which leads to the Battle of Bravalla and the death of Harald,¹ and he lends Dag the spear with which the latter kills the hero Helgi, and thereby avenges his father.²

In the Arthurian legend the Spielman is Merlin, who is always turning up in unexpected guises, and urging the other characters on to deeds, usually of violence.

The Homeric poems are of composite origin, and in the *Iliad* there is no regular Spielman, though Zeus occasionally takes the part. In the *Odyssey*, on the other hand, the part is taken regularly by Athena, that is, presumably by the priestess who represents her. She makes the spears of the suitors ineffective; she strikes the suitors with panic; she causes Dawn to wake Odysseus; she infuses fresh vigour into Laertes; she consults with Zeus (presumably the presiding priest) as to the future course of events.³ "It is ob-

¹ H. M. Chadwick, op. cit., p. 251.

² B. S. Phillpotts, op. cit., p. 54.

³ *Odyssey* xxii, 265, 297; xxiv, 334, 513, 472.

"vious," says Miss Stawell,¹ "that we cannot think of "her in this case as an all-wise prophetess, for . . . "she is urging her favourite on a course she knows will "end in bitterest grief." But it is no function of the ritual drama, or of its director, to secure the happiness of the characters. Is Shakespeare to be blamed for not giving *Romeo and Juliet* a happy ending?

It seems probable that in the earliest ritual drama, in Greece and elsewhere, the Spielman spoke but did not act, and the other characters acted but did not speak. The original speaker seems to have been the "logios "anér," or man of words, the words being, of course, the sacred words. At Delos the part was played by the Homeros, who took the character of Apollo, and led the hymns and sacred dances in virtue of his victory in the contest of minstrelsy.²

On the Roman stage there was a custom by which the lyric portions of the text were entrusted to a singer who stood with a flute-player at the side of the stage, while the actor confined himself to dancing in silence with appropriate dumb-show. Sir E. K. Chambers, who cites this custom, says that it was unknown in Greece,³ but the actors were apparently all Greeks, and the custom seems to have been in the Greek tradition.

We find a similar custom in Java. "The subject of "the *tópeng* is invariably taken from the adventures of "Pànji, the favourite hero of Javan story. In the performances before the sovereign, where masks are not "used, the several characters themselves rehearse their "parts, but, in general, the Dàlang, or manager of the "entertainment, recites the speeches, while the performers have only to 'suit the action to the word.'"⁴

It is difficult to believe that this custom, whether at Rome or in Java, could have arisen out of the ordinary drama, and it seems more likely that in the original

¹ F. M. Stawell, *Homer and the Iliad*, p. 14.

² J. A. K. Thomson, op. cit., pp. 205, 207, 224.

³ E. K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, vol. i, p. 6.

⁴ T. S. Raffles, op. cit., vol. i, p. 374.

drama, that is, the ritual drama, the words were so sacred that they could be uttered only by the representative of the god, and that the other characters began by acting in dumb-show only, and when they did begin to speak, still left the principal, or the most sacred, speeches to a Spielman, who was a sacred personage. In most of the traditional narratives the traces of this custom have been lost, but, if I am right, they still survive in some of them, and in particular in the *Volsunga Saga* and the *Odyssey*.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE RITUAL DRAMA

THE thesis of this book is that the traditional narrative, in all its forms, is based not upon historical facts on the one hand or imaginative fictions on the other, but upon dramatic ritual or ritual drama. I began by attempting to show that the belief that people have a natural interest in historical facts and a natural ability to transmit them is devoid of foundation. I then took a number of quasi-historical traditions, and showed that there is no valid evidence for their historicity, and that many of them are demonstrably unhistoric. I next gave the evidence for connecting the myth and the folktale with ritual, and for believing that the hero-tale is derived from ritual and not from fact.

In the third part of the book I have taken a number of the features of the traditional narrative and shown that they suggest, if they do not prove, that these narratives are dramatic in origin.

If the views which I have put forward are correct, it follows that the ritual drama, or at any rate dramatic ritual, must have played a far larger part in human affairs than is generally recognized, and it will be the object of this concluding chapter to show that this is the fact.

I have, perhaps, used the terms ritual drama and dramatic ritual somewhat loosely, and it is desirable to show where the difference lies. Ritual, in itself, is not necessarily dramatic. A rite may consist merely in muttering a spell over a weapon or pot of poison to make it more potent; it becomes dramatic when persons other than the principals are present, and they are to be impressed. A coronation is an example of a dramatic rite. If the archbishop were simply to crown the king in the privacy of his chamber, it would not be dramatic; it becomes dramatic when it is performed

in Westminster Abbey in the presence of a large number of people, most of whom take little or no part in the proceedings. The difference between a dramatic rite and a ritual drama is that in the latter there is personification. In the coronation ceremony the king is the king and the archbishop is the archbishop, but in the crowning of the May Queen, the latter is not really a queen, but merely pretends to be one. It is the same when the king pretends to be a god. The importance of the distinction is that the ritual, whether simple or dramatic, need have no story; its myth may be merely a formula, or set of formulas. Where it has a story, we may suspect that it once formed part of a ritual drama, to which a story is essential. The myth of a ritual drama must be in narrative form, since a person makes a dramatic pretence of being someone else only in order that he may pretend to do what that someone is supposed to have done. The chief actor in a ritual drama pretends to be a god or hero—as we have seen, there is no real difference between them—in order that he may be able to exercise the power which that god or hero is believed to have exercised. The myth then becomes an account of what the god or hero once did, and the ritual drama gradually takes on the character of a commemoration, enacted from motives of general piety rather than from a belief in its actual and immediate efficacy.

After this preliminary discussion, I shall proceed to examine at some length the Attic drama, since from it must come a large part of the evidence necessary to show that the secular drama is derived from the ritual drama, that the ritual drama was of the highest religious importance, and that the plots of the ritual drama are not derived from history, which has no religious importance, but are the myths which grew up with the drama, of which they formed an essential part.

The ritual origin of the Attic drama has been widely recognized. Thus Professor Allardyce Nicoll¹ says that “in Greece the choral song chanted round the

¹ Op. cit., p. 52.

"altar of the god developed along the twin lines of "tragic and of comic or satirical expression," and Professor Stuart¹ that "tragedy and comedy both owed "their origin to rituals of the cult of Dionysus. . . . "The ritual was not commemorative of past events. It "dealt with the present and was performed in order to "ensure fertility in the future."

Its religious character in historic times is quite evident. Dramas were performed only at the festival of Dionysos. During the days of performance the city was in a state of taboo. Every citizen had to attend the performances as an act of worship, but the principal seats in the theatre were occupied by the priests, and by the image of the god.² Yet even those who recognize these facts have failed to realize their implications, and many scholars are still reluctant to recognize them. The well-considered attempts of Professors Gilbert Murray and F. M. Cornford to reconstruct from the dramas the ritual upon which they were based³ have been met by the criticism that their theories are valueless, since no such rituals are known to have been performed. This criticism sounds plausible enough, but when analysed it is found to be based on the belief that we are in possession of full knowledge both of early Greek ritual and of the development of the Attic drama. Such evidence as we have, however, is traditional, and therefore has no historical value.

The ritual of the dramas, if ritual it was, was certainly royal ritual, but our knowledge of actual Greek ritual is derived almost entirely from Pausanias (c. A.D. 170) and other comparatively late writers. By the time of Pausanias royalty had been extinct in Greece, except at Sparta, for at least seven hundred years, and in spite of the conservatism of the priesthood, the rites described by those who wrote after the

¹ D. C. Stuart, *The Development of Dramatic Art*, p. 103.

² J. E. Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual*, pp. 10 seq.

³ G. Murray, in J. E. Harrison, *Themis*, pp. 341 seq; F. M. Cornford, *The Origin of the Attic Comedy*.

beginning of the Christian era must have been very different from those practised when the drama first came into being.

The accepted view of the origin of the Attic tragedy is that it was evolved among rustics, and in a more or less rudimentary form was brought to Athens by Thespis about the year 535 B.C. Thespis was the first to have an actor independent of the chorus, and a year or two later won the first prize in the tragic competition, which had been started in the meantime. Ten years later was born Aeschylus, who raised tragedy to heights which were afterwards reached only by Sophocles and Euripides, and never surpassed.

It is only the belief in the historicity of tradition which prevents this story from being recognized as a tissue of absurdities. There is no historical evidence for Thespis at all. He is first mentioned by Aristotle about 330 B.C., and it is neither claimed by nor on behalf of Aristotle that he had any documentary evidence. He was, there seems to be no doubt, merely repeating a tradition which, like all traditions, is historically worthless. It is difficult to understand how any judicious person can believe that such a culture form as the drama, or indeed any culture form, could be invented by rustics; how, when introduced into a city such as Athens, it could immediately become the central feature of the most important religious festival; how a dramatic competition, previously quite unknown, could suddenly appear in full swing, and how a form of art which was entirely new to the world could in fifty years rise to a height which has been the admiration and model of Europe ever since.

Every feature of the Attic drama, both tragedy and comedy, as we meet it in the fifth century B.C., points to a long period of evolution. If we were told that the first beginning of Greek statuary was in 535 B.C., when a rustic came into Athens carrying a crudely carved wooden image, we should, of course, reject the idea with scorn, but it is in no way more absurd than the story of Thespis.

The development of the Athenian tragedy came to an end with Euripides because nothing more could be done within the limits of form and content set by the tradition arising from the ancient ritual. It must have taken many centuries for the ritual to develop, either at Athens or elsewhere, into so complex a dramatic form, and many more for the idea of the drama as ritual to decline to a point at which the idea of competition could be transferred to it from the games, which must have undergone a similarly long course of development and decline.

Having touched on the development of the Attic drama, we must now examine its content. It was, we must repeat, the central feature of a great religious festival; it was comparable to, and perhaps the prototype of, the mystery or miracle plays of medieval Europe, and since the plots of the Christian religious drama were drawn from the Christian scriptures, we are entitled to suggest that the plots of the Greek religious drama were drawn from the Greek scriptures. A purely secular subject would be quite out of place in a religious drama. The characters in the miracle plays, Noah and Abraham, for example, are certainly not ordinary human beings, and were probably once gods. Similarly the characters in the Attic tragedy, such as Agamemnon and Odysseus, are not ordinary human beings, and were probably once gods. The evidence that the Greek heroes were once gods is stronger than the evidence that the Hebrew heroes were once gods, since, as we have seen, Greek heroes were worshipped as gods in historic times, and Greek gods were identified with heroes. The Spartans worshipped Zeus under the name of Agamemnon, and the fact that Agamemnon was Zeus explains his position among the heroes, which is exactly equivalent to the position of Zeus among the gods; explains why various kingdoms and various capitals were ascribed to him,¹ and above all explains why he was one of the most important characters in the Athenian religious drama. The only

¹ H. M. Chadwick, *The Heroic Age*, p. 240.

writer I have found who attempts to explain why the Attic tragedians should have set aside the stories of their own kings in favour of foreigners, which, on the assumption that they are historical, is as if Shakespeare had confined himself to writing about the Merovingians, is Dr. Pickard-Cambridge, who tells us "that it can easily be understood how enterprising and "imaginative poets should have seized on the legends, "experimenting freely, and ultimately rejecting stories "which did not make good plays, and so settling down "(as Aristotle says) to the stories of a few houses."¹ That the stories make good plays is quite untrue—some of the best of the tragedies have no plot at all—and there is no evidence that the dramatists experimented; they certainly did not settle down, since the range of Euripides, the last great tragedian, is no less wide than that of Aeschylus, the first. Their themes were taken from the body of sacred legends, but that does not necessarily mean that the stories were sacred to them. The stories of Heracles, like those of Samson, for example, formed part of the sacred legends, but they could hardly be regarded as sacred in themselves. The dramatists could treat the myths as they pleased, but could not go outside them.

The one exception which has come down to us is *The Persians* of Aeschylus. It deals with an historic event, the Battle of Salamis, and historic characters, Xerxes and his mother Atossa. Yet the play is purely fictitious. To cultured Athenians the ghost of Darius and the masculine part played by Atossa must have been highly unconvincing, and they must have realized that Xerxes could not have kept his throne if he had behaved as he is represented as behaving, and that anyhow Aeschylus could not have known what passed in the palace at Susa. But all this did not distress them, since what they were accustomed to was not history but myth. Aeschylus gave them myth with a gratifying topical flavour and was awarded the first prize.

¹ A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, op. cit., p. 196.

The subject of the Attic drama is inexhaustible; I hope that enough has been said to show that it was religious in its character and origin, and that its themes were derived not from history but from myth.

There are indications that there was a similar drama in Northern Europe, the ancient religion of which has many points of resemblance to that of Greece, from which it was probably derived. Miss Phillpotts tells us¹ that "the Norwegian Eddic poems bear the unmistakable stamp of dramatic origin. . . . Yet these poems are not the remains of folk-drama in the modern sense of that word. Modern folk-drama is a degenerate descendant of the ancient religious drama, whereas these poems are the actual shattered remains of ancient religious drama."

"Four of the extant plays," she says later,² "make Thor the hero of the encounter . . . and the representation of his victories probably tended to ensure the safety of mankind against redoubtable foes. We may be allowed to note a similarity between the Northern Thor and the Greek Heracles of comedy and myth." They both visit the world of the dead; they both fight Old Age; they both indulge in ribaldry and tauntings, and both are gigantic eaters and drinkers. "Thor never appears in heroic story; Heracles barely appears in Homer. Both have comic associations incompatible with heroic Saga. Their place is in drama."

Ritual drama is at the base of the sagas themselves. "So the plain historical tale of how one Helgi Hjorvardsson loved and died, of how Helgi Hundingsbane had the misfortune to kill his wife's brother, how one Hedinn fought with his bride's father, was spared by him and seven years later fought again, of how another Hedinn won his brother's bride—these stories slip from our hands as we try to grasp them. They are not history but literature, literature working on memories of a drama which was not commemora-

¹ B. S. Phillpotts, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

² *Ibid.*, p. 135.

"tive but magical."¹ Helgi and Hedinn, the names of the heroes, are originally not names at all, but descriptions of characters in the ritual drama; Helgi is "the 'holy one,'" and Hedinn "the shaggy one," that is, the one clad in beast-skins.² We may remember that when Gunnar disguises himself in "a great rough cloak" he is called "Hedinn."³

"That the old heathen religion was an essentially 'dramatic one,'" says Professor Karl Pearson,⁴ "can scarcely be doubted; we have proof enough not only 'in written statements, but in a vast number of dramatic folk-customs of heathen origin. We find many 'cases in which heathen customs were introduced into 'Christian churches . . . both monks and nuns indulged in dances and masquerades directly connected 'with heathen festivals. . . . Other records of a 'similar date [the ninth century] speak of the monks 'mumming as wolves, foxes or bears and of other 'diabolical' masquerades. . . . Even in the fifteenth 'century the Church had not freed itself from these 'strange performances. The 'feast of fools' had become an established institution. A fool-bishop having 'been chosen with many absurd ceremonies, monks 'and priests conducted him to the cathedral. With 'faces smeared with ochre or hidden by hideous 'masks, clad as women, as beasts, or as jugglers, these 'clerical mummers proceeded singing and dancing to 'the very altar-steps. The fool-bishop read the service 'and gave his benediction, while his bacchanalian 'following threw dice and ate sausages on the altar 'itself. The burning of dung and old bits of shoe-leather took the place of incense, and the utmost 'license and disorder prevailed both inside and outside 'the sacred building."

But this was not the only type of dramatic performance which took place in the churches. There was

¹ B. S. Phillpotts, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

² *Ibid.*, p. 163.

³ G. W. Dasent, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁴ *The Chances of Death*, vol. ii, p. 281.

"again points to impersonation of the gods. When "narrative intervenes, that is generally because it deals "with matters that cannot be dramatically represented." This incoherence, and this alternation of dialogue and narrative, are characteristic of tradition, both the quasi-historical and the quasi-imaginative.

"We shall probably not err in assuming," says Sir James Frazer,¹ "with some eminent authorities, that "the ceremonies of the nativity of the Pharaohs, thus "emblazoned on the walls of Egyptian temples, were "copied from the life; in other words, that the carved "and painted scenes represent a real drama, which "was acted by masked men and women whenever a "queen of Egypt was brought to bed. 'Here, as "everywhere else in Egypt,' says Professor Maspero, "sculptor and painter did nothing but faithfully "imitate reality. . . . Theory required that the assimilation of the kings to the gods should be complete, "so that every act of the royal life was, as it were, a "tracing of the corresponding act of the divine life. "From the moment that the king was Ammon, he "wore the costume and badges of Ammon—the tall "hat with the long plumes, the cross of life, the "greyhound-headed sceptre—and thus arrayed he "presented himself in the queen's bedchamber to "consummate the marriage. The assistants also "assumed the costume of the divinities whom they "incarnated; the men put on masks of jackals, hawks, "and crocodiles, while the women donned masks of "cows or frogs. . . . In general we are bound to hold "that all the pictures traced on the walls of the "temples, in which the person of the king is concerned, correspond to a real action in which disguised personages played the part of gods."

If this is correct, as there is no reason to doubt, then the Egyptian artists were acting similarly to the artists of fifteenth-century Italy, who painted endless pictures of the Holy Family and the Apostles dressed in the costumes of that century. This was not because

¹ *Golden Bough*, vol. ii, p. 133.

they imagined that such costume was worn in Palestine in the first century of the Christian era, but because they were not trying to imagine anything, but merely to paint what they saw in the miracle plays and religious processions of their own day. And why should we suppose that the Greek artists acted differently? We saw reason to believe that the pictures of the Minotaur and of Ixion were drawn from real sacrificial rites;¹ it is equally probable that the pictures of the gods and Homeric heroes were drawn from scenes in the religious drama. The same applies to the Scandinavian carvings of scenes from the *Volsunga Saga*. There is no reason to believe that these artists or their patrons had any interest in or knowledge of history; that they were intensely interested in the religious drama is in many cases certain.

If the view here put forward is correct, then we should expect to find the ritual drama and the traditional narrative going, so to speak, hand in hand; where there is a large variety of one there should be, or have been, a large variety of the other; where there is a particular type of one, there should be a particular type of the other; and where there is none of one there should be none of the other. And this is what we do find. Professor Hooke and his collaborators² have brought forward a vast amount of evidence to show that an intimate connection existed between myths and other traditions and the ritual drama in Mesopotamia, Syria, and Egypt. In Greece we have seen that the deeds of the gods and heroes were enacted in the ritual drama, and that there is no good reason to believe that in their human forms they had any existence outside it. At Rome, on the other hand, there seems to have been no ritual drama and very little dramatic ritual; and there was correspondingly little in the way of traditional narrative, so little that when Virgil wished to write a patriotic poem, he had to fall back upon the Tale of Troy.

¹ *Supra*, p. 161.

² In *Myth and Ritual* and *The Labyrinth*.

A great deal has been written on the dramas of India, China, Siam, etc.,¹ showing the close connection of the stage in those countries with religion and with tradition.

In America the connection between the myths of the Indians and their ritual dramas is well recognized, and the same may be said for the Australian blacks. These peoples have almost nothing in their traditions that even suggests history.

In Africa it would seem that many tribes have a very limited range of traditional narratives and of dramatic rites, but we have a few examples of the ritual drama, in which its connection with myth is clearly apparent. A cult-hero of Central Africa is called Ryang'ombe. During ceremonies to exorcise disease, "and also in 'the mysteries celebrated from time to time,'" certain personages are not only recognized as mediums of Ryang'ombe and other superior spirits, but actually assume their characters and for the time being are addressed by their names.

Having been mortally wounded by a girl who turned into a buffalo, and helped by a maid-servant called Nkonzo, Ryang'ombe gave directions for the honours to be paid to him after his death; these are, so to speak, the charter of the society which practises the cult of the spirits. He specially insisted that Nkonzo, as a reward for her services, should have a place in these rites, and accordingly she is represented by one of the performers at the initiation ceremony.² This is a good example of the way in which rites are referred to a mythical founder.

Dr. Meek gives us an interesting example. "Among 'the Mambila, of the British Cameroons, there is a 'moon cult in which the moon is personated by a man 'wearing a string costume and animal-headed mask. 'At the rising of the moon the masker appears and is 'ceremonially fed with beer, the priest asking that, by 'his graciousness, they may all have prosperity that

¹ *Vide W. Ridgeway, Dramas and Dramatic Dances.*

² A. Werner, *Myths and Legends of the Bantu*, pp. 112-17.

"month. A feast is held, and there is general rejoicing. "When the moon is about to disappear the masker "again appears and acts the part of a dying god. He "bids farewell to the people, and forbids them to grieve, "for in three days he will rise again and come unto "them."¹ Here we see that the moon god is not the result of speculation, neither is he a deified hero; he is simply a performer in a ritual drama.

For Polynesian traditions I shall rely on Mr. Percy Smith, and he, though he believes firmly in the historicity of these traditions, nevertheless gives us a number of indications that they are really accounts of ritual drama. Thus he tells us that "much of the old "history of the Polynesians was regarded as sacred, "and its communication to those who would make "an improper use of it would inevitably—in the belief "of the old priests—bring down disaster on the heads "of the reciters. . . . This teaching [of the tribal "lore] was accompanied by many ceremonies, incan- "tations, invocations, etc. . . . There was a special "sanctity attached to many things taught; deviation "from the accepted doctrine, or history, was supposed "to bring down on the offender the wrath of the gods."²

He later says that "there was a class of roving actors "and players, who were also the custodians of much of "the historic traditions," and that "the history of "Onokura is a very remarkable one . . . the narrative "is interspersed with recitative, which would take "many hours in delivery. It is, in fact, a regular "South Sea Opera."³

If these traditional narratives were really history, and if the teaching of history followed the same course in this country as it is alleged to in Polynesia, we should find professors imploring their pupils not to make an improper use of the Constitutions of Clarendon; boys learning the names of Henry VIII's wives with incantations and invocations; people convicted of blas-

¹ C. K. Meek, op. cit., p. 124.

² S. Percy Smith, *Hawaiki*, p. 14.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 38, 222.

phemy for mixing up Thomas Cromwell with Oliver; and the history of the Corn Laws related with vocal and instrumental accompaniment. These traditions are sacred, not because they contain historical facts, which are never sacred, but because they are accounts of ritual, which, whether dramatized or not, is always sacred.

This survey of the ritual drama is anything but complete, but it may suffice to show that the ritual drama has played a highly important part in the religious and social life of many peoples, a part compared with which that played by history has been inconsiderable, and that the connection between the ritual drama and the traditional narrative is often demonstrable. While there is not, or at any rate I cannot claim to have found, evidence that the traditional narrative is *always* connected with the ritual drama, yet I hope that I have shown that this connection is everywhere at least probable, whereas there is nowhere any valid evidence to connect the traditional narrative with historical fact.

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